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SENSUAL SOUNDS
PHOEBE BRIDGERS'S PROPHETIC NEW ALBUM

INTERVIEW WITH
NBA STAR CHARLES BARKLEY

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DIPSEA THE CLIMAX SOUN TRACK!

IS WEED SPORTS *MVP?*
USING CANNABIS FOR PAIN RELIEF

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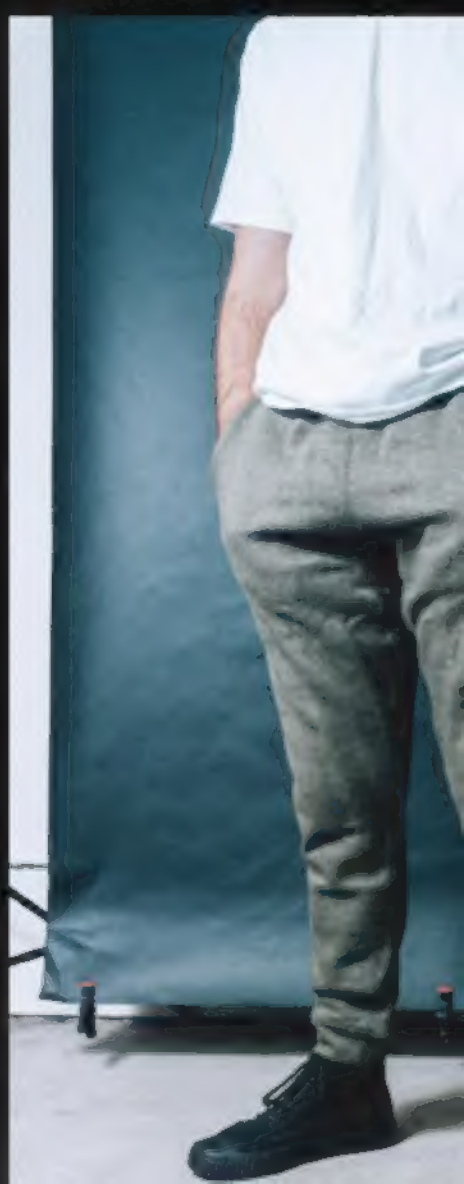

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Illustrations **Toon53 Productions**

Motoring Editor **John Page**

Senior Photo Editor **Luba V Nel**

ADVERTISING SALES **pieter@dhsmedia.co.za**

for more information

PHONE: +27 10 006 0051
MAIL: PO Box 71450, Bryanston, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2021
ADDRESS: First Floor Block 6 Fourways Office Park, Cnr Roos Street & Fourways Boulevard, 2191
EMAIL: info@dhsmedia.co.za
WEB: www.playboymagaustralia.com
FACEBOOK: facebook.com/Playboy-Australia
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No 35 | **November 2020**

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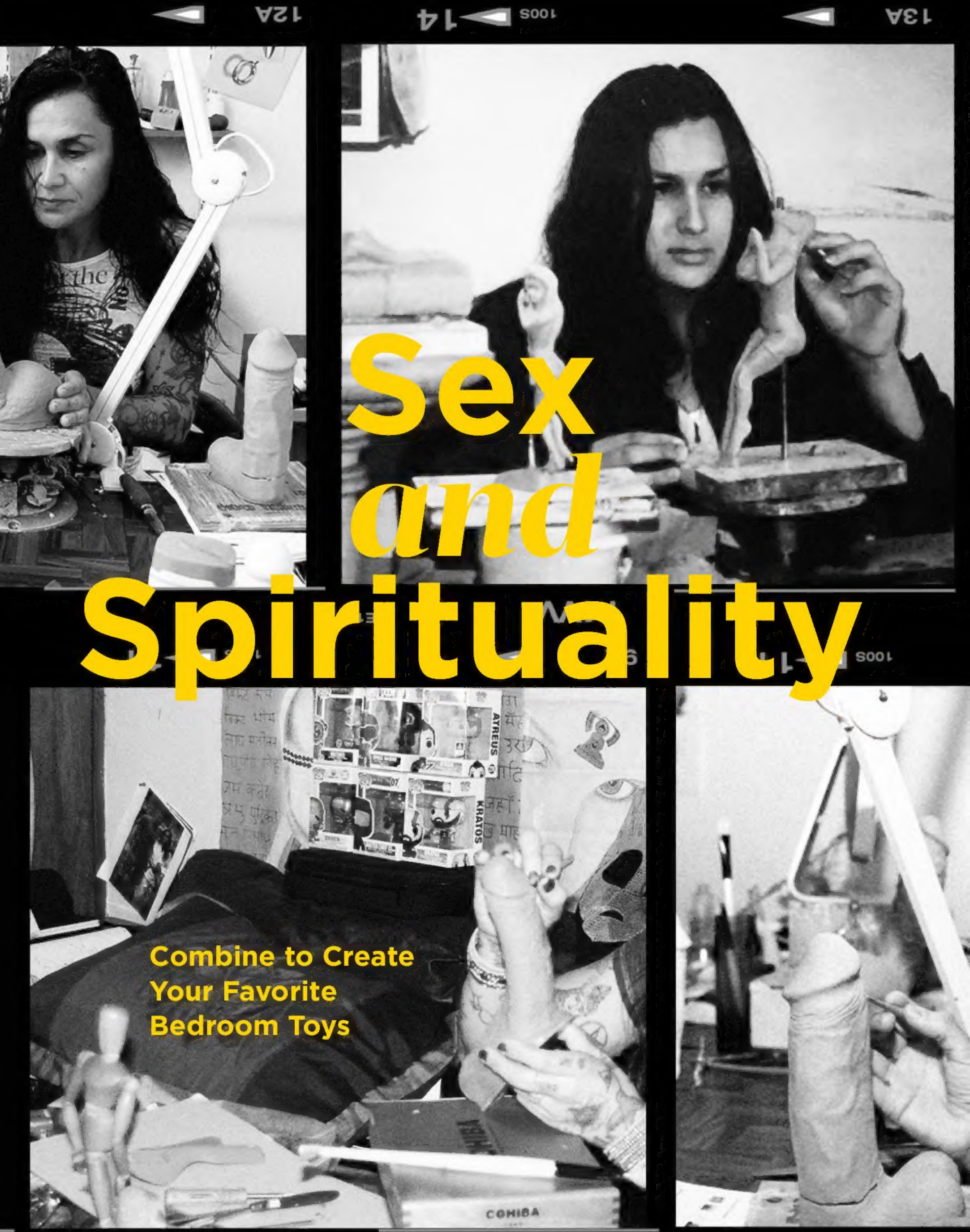
Sex
and
Spirituality
Combine to Create
Your Favorite
Bedroom Toys
ATREUS
KRATOS
COHIBA

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Perhaps you've never truly taken the time to consider what goes into making some of your favorite sex toys, or maybe the process doesn't interest you enough to give it a real thought. Regardless, I'm willing to bet that you've never thought about the spirituality that goes into crafting some of your favorite bedroom props.

But such is the case when it's Anjani Siddhartha who's creating them.

The separation between sexuality and spirituality is a tale as old as time, and a fable at that. Although we don't have nearly enough time (or energy, let's be real) to deconstruct the root of that conditioning, we can focus on how the dance between the two can actually create a harmony that few allow themselves the pleasure to experience. Siddhartha wants to aid those who are on that journey.

Playboy interviews Anjani Siddhartha, the in-house dildo artist at the Doc Johnson sex toy company

BY **BRUNA**

The artist stumbled upon her job at Doc Johnson, the largest sex toy manufacturer in the U.S., after a friend asked if she'd like to replace him in a design job. Going into the job blind yet open, Siddhartha was shocked to realize she'd be sculpting sex toys—but it was a task she wasn't going to back down from. She designs the sex toys either by making casts from adult performers or sculpting them vein by vein from her imagination. Painstakingly getting the shape of a penis head just right is simply part of her job.

"To me it is art," Siddhartha tells me. "I liked the environment and having my own studio, so I started designing that day."

Enter the Doc Johnson headquarters and you'll find Siddhartha tucked away in her own erotic cave, handcrafting some of the brand's most famous dildos and other adult toys while surrounded by art and objects that inspire her.

"I have been very sensual and spiritual all my life, so my inspiration has always been fine arts and the sensual paintings of India," Siddhartha says.

"When I design a piece, it is just as if I am working on a sacred piece that will bring physical and emotional pleasure to thousands of people all over the world," she says. "It is part of my way of life, creating and shaping an object that will bring pleasure to many. Also, it is part of my meditation of being in the moment when I am sculpting."

From the devotional tattoos that decorate her arms to the intentional focus that is hard to ignore while watching her work, it's clear Siddhartha is no stranger to spirituality.

Her primary goal is always to "be here and now and fully aware of the unity of myself as a consciousness using the body-mind vehicle to express myself in the physical universe with integrity. And to use this very moment to live to the fullest following my passion."

Through her spirituality and deep connection to her own sensuality, Siddhartha has managed to design and craft unique bedroom toys for over two decades with the objective of providing consumers the chance to experience something greater than themselves.

"Through sensual experiences, we can transcend to a place where body and mind sensations can be refined to feel divine," she says. "There's unity in diversity."

Nonetheless, Siddhartha is aware that much of her life is rooted in the intersection of two concepts that don't usually mix. For many, sex toys are still considered taboo. Sprinkle that with some religious viewpoints and you might as well light a fire, because that conversation is going to get heated.

Still, Siddhartha says she's hopeful that through her work, people can reconnect with the parts of themselves that have been silenced, either out of shame or judgement, because that duality is alive in all of us whether we acknowledge it or not.

"We live in the world of duality, so it is expected to always have opposite views on every subject," she says. "But the world is ever-changing, and if people open their minds to other possibilities they can be more tolerant of the ways others live their lives."

Although the jury is still out on that, Siddhartha can't deny that the sex toy industry has changed tremendously during her time at Doc Johnson.

"The internet has become the biggest influence in the industry, as I am sure it is for most enterprises and life in general," she says. "Now we can go to forums and see what customers are looking for, reactions to products, what others are doing in the same space. We do surveys, and also have many celebrities endorsing products. It has made the industry a bit more mainstream."

The industry's audience has also become more inclusive.

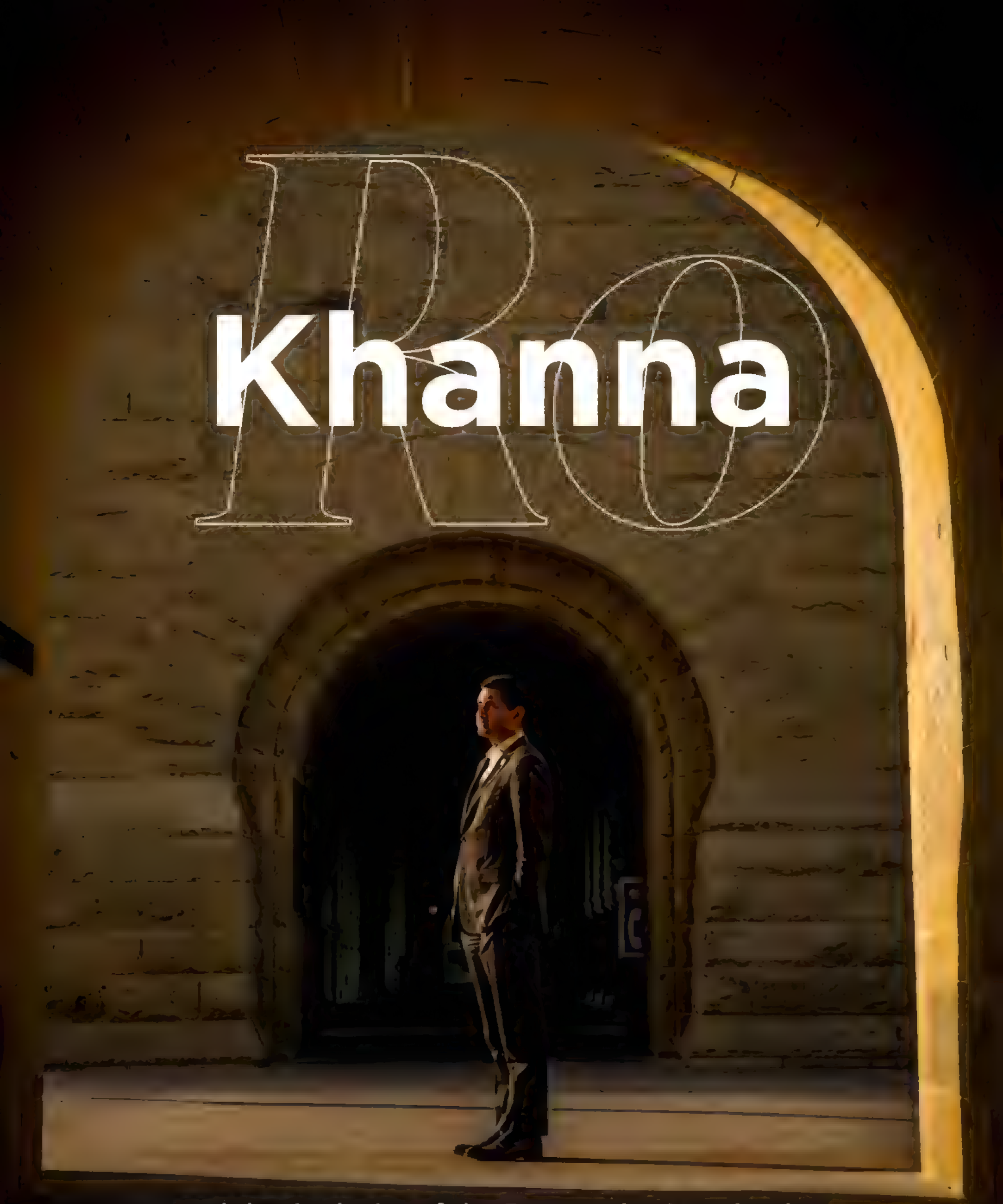
"Now it is not a male-dominated space, but also couples and women," Siddhartha says, adding that it's no longer seen as the "sleazy, dark store in a bad part of town, but the fancy boutique where ladies and couples buy their products to experiment with new sensual adventures."

Not only that, but, as Siddhartha has proven for more than 20 years, there is actual artistry put into the creation of your favorite bedroom toys, with the intention of spiritually putting you back in touch with your sensuality—whether that's done with yourself or with someone else.

"It is part of my way of life, creating and shaping an object that will bring pleasure to many. It is part of my meditation."

COURTESY **OF SUBJECT**

Ro Khanna



and the Audacity of the Progressive Imagination

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CHRISTIE HEMM KLOK**

> I was born in Philadelphia in 1976, the bicentennial, and put very simply, I just want this country to give everyone the chance that they gave me, a son of immigrants."

The Silicon Valley congressman, along with other key Democrats, envisions a new future for the working class

BY **ALEX THOMAS**

Though Capitol Hill was empty due to the pandemic, there were rumblings of a legislative uprising outside the old marble halls.

In early April, the Congressional Progressive Caucus, a large but loose group of congress members who, to various extents, subscribe to progressive policies, was working legislative tricks hoping to bend the latest coronavirus stimulus bill further to the left. It was hardly a unique move for the group of lawmakers, and it had a predictable end—one in which Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi passed the bill she was aiming to get through. The moment seemed to reckon with a larger understanding of the current attitude in America, an attitude in which occupations like grocery cashier and delivery driver are now essential and even celebrated.

Early in the coronavirus pandemic, Congressman Ro Khanna, who represents a Silicon Valley district peppered with tech giants like Apple and Yahoo, joined Senator Elizabeth Warren in a proposal for an "Essential Workers Bill of Rights," and called on Congress to include their policies in the next coronavirus relief package.

When Warren and Khanna released their proposal, Khanna highlighted the fights of essential workers, saying "the grocery clerk that packs our groceries behind a plastic shield, the bus driver sanitizing seats between shifts, and the security guard on watch from a distance: these heroic workers are keeping this country afloat. They deserve every benefit and protection we can give them, starting with those outlined in our Essential Workers Bill of Rights."

Khanna and Warren's proposed Bill of Rights included some broad statements, such as, "All essential workers should get the care they need during this crisis, including those who are uninsured or under-insured, regardless of their immigration status."

But there were other, fine-tuned requests, such as, "Any federal funding should be designed to ensure that employers cannot skirt the rules by firing or furloughing workers or reducing their hours or benefits in order to access a tax credit or avoid a worker protection requirement."

For some, the Essential Workers Bill of Rights was a progressive flag in the ground. Nelini Stamp of the Working Families Party praised the proposal during a conversation with Playboy. "We need an Essential Workers Bill of Rights," she said. "It's really, really clear that we need it more than ever to protect working people. And it's really great that [Warren and Khanna] have been championing that fight."

Stamp, like many progressives, is frustrated by the pace of change. "We, as the United States, need the level of investment that we've put in for things like war," she added.

Khanna has become a powerful voice in Congress, in part because of the enormous tech riches shimmering in his district. He's a tall and thin former Stanford lecturer who grew up in suburban Philadelphia as the son of middle-class immigrants. He entered Congress by running on a progressive platform and beating a Democratic congressman in a safe district. Two years later, a New York bartender named Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez would make the same play and become the youngest congresswoman in history and a household name overnight.

"Why can't this country do that for everyone?" Khanna mused to Playboy in a December conversation in his office on Capitol Hill. "I was born in Philadelphia in 1976, the bicentennial. Put very simply, I just want this country to give everyone the chance it gave me, a son of immigrants. So that's really what my governing philosophy is."

Khanna talks like the West Coast Ivy lecturer that he was for a few years. He has large ideas about jobs in the Midwest, with sidebars about things like the 1890s and the Industrial Revolution tracing to the 1929 stock market crash.

In addition to being a voice for economic equality and working-class protections in Silicon Valley, Khanna has dedicated his platform to advocating for marginalized groups that are often missing from the Capitol Hill conversation. Just last year, he introduced a pro–sex worker bill intended to combat the ill effects of SESTA-FOSTA, the controversial legislation aimed at curbing sex trafficking that instead made many legitimate sex workers' jobs more difficult and dangerous.

Khanna told Playboy that he wants a full repeal, but that in the meantime we should "at least repeal the provisions that are overbroad and forcing sex workers out onto the street." He added that he expects a study of SESTA-FOSTA would find that the policy "has led to increased violence and sexual assault against sex workers, and that the most impacted have been women of color, the LGBT+ community and the trans community."

"Almost one-fifth of transgender individuals have engaged in sex work and are at higher risk for violence and higher risk for assault," he said. "I don't think there's awareness about the link between the most marginalized communities and sex workers."

In Khanna's America, everyone should have the right to economically thrive and earn a living—safely. It shouldn't matter if you're a frontline healthcare worker, an Amazon factory worker, a white-collar

In Khanna's America, everyone should have the right to economically thrive and earn a living—safely.

employee with the privilege of working from home or a sex worker.

Khanna described the road to that America by saying, "You'd have to do [sex work decriminalization] thoughtfully in a way that you still criminalize sex trafficking and child trafficking, but you aren't going after sex workers."

Six months after our conversation in his comfortable Washington office, America is a nation in the grip of a virus. The death toll is climbing north from 115,000, and the country has relied for months on the grocery clerks and bus drivers that Khanna nodded to in his statement accompanying the Essential Workers Bill of Rights.

Outside the Capitol, I stood a few feet away from a masked Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. "We need to move closer to a point where healthcare is actually treated as a right," she told Playboy. "I don't think we should be subsidizing for-profit health insurance companies. I think we should be expanding Medicare to allow unemployed people to opt in."

Ocasio-Cortez's ideas echoed those set down in Khanna and Warren's proposal: their call for "a full federal subsidy of fifteen months of COBRA for employees who lose eligibility for health care coverage." The latest stimulus bill didn't fully achieve that, but it was a nod to progressives like Khanna and Warren.

The progressive fight has come to the forefront during the pandemic, and expanding access to health care is at the center of that battle. For progressives in the mold of Khanna and Warren and AOC, it has been a driving point of their political philosophy. And even President Donald Trump seems to have briefly realized that this health crisis surpasses politics. When asked last month by a reporter at the White House if the coronavirus vaccine will be free, he responded, "We're looking at that, actually."

The progressive uprising that rumbled through the empty halls of Congress before the passage of the HEROES Act was voiced largely by Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, who co-chairs the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Jayapal was the only member of the massive caucus to vote against the bill, and, in her statement accompanying that vote, she said she voted against the legislation in part because the bill "does not guarantee affordable and accessible health care for everyone." But Jayapal, who came to Congress in the same class as Khanna, is no longer the far-left voice in the wilderness of Congress. It is a body that's always shifting, under the constant strain of a nation that has seen two major political revolutions in Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in the past four years.

In late April, a group of progressives released a list of demands that asked for the legislation that would become the HEROES Act to "ensure full health coverage with no out-of-pocket costs for any Covid-19 care by expanding Medicare to cover those on unemployment and those who have lost insurance." That letter included the signatures of Jayapal and Khanna.

Although former Vice President Joe Biden hails from the more centrist wing of the Democratic party, he seems to have realized that the progressive movement and its voters have at least earned a seat at the table. He announced unity task forces aimed at uniting the progressive and centrist wings of the party. Jayapal was named a co-chair of the task force on health care; Ocasio-Cortez was named a co-chair of the task force on climate change. The task force was an obvious nod to progressive voters who have never been enchanted by Biden. And change may sometimes be difficult; in April, Ocasio-Cortez told The New York Times, "The whole process of coming together should be uncomfortable for everyone involved."

The attention that progressives are earning in Congress and in the presidential race might not have been as powerful if we weren't living in a moment when essential workers have become the most important segment of our society. Alas, the pandemic has proven that the myth of reclusive billionaires and hedge fund managers and high-powered executives holding civilization together was greatly exaggerated. There is an obvious desire to keep the real backbone of society safe, and the progressives see their ideas as the best way to accomplish that goal.

But still, the progressives, a group with a seemingly Sisyphean task, have said that not enough is being done to protect those workers. While progressives toil to secure protections for essential workers in the pandemic, those workers carry on, delivering our packages, packing our grocery haul and, sometimes, saving our lives

Model **@ITSDRAGANROSE_**

Photography by **ARTHUR ST. JOHN | @ARTHURSTJOHN**
HMUA **TAYLOR JAZZ | @TAYLOR_JAZZ**

Where were you born? Where did you grow up? Where do you live now?
I was born in Coral Springs, FL but I grew up in Palm Bay, FL. I live in Central Florida now so I can be close to family.

What's your favorite color?
Black

What type of music do you enjoy most? Favorite artist?
Pop and Rap. Pop Smoke has all my fav vibes.

Favorite movie of all time? Favorite actor?
Dead Poets Society - Robin Williams

Read the book or watch the movie?
It used to be read the book but now I'm a watch the movie kind of person.

If you could be an animal, what would you be and why?
I would be a Tiger because that is my spirt animal. Born to be untamable, wild and the Queen of my world.

What is your favorite body part on you? on him?
My Eyes and His Heart.

What attracts you the most in a man?
Manners and Respect.

Biggest turn on? Biggest turn off?
Southern charm. Smells/Dirtiness

Describe your perfect date.
A horse back riding adventure or dinner and drinks at an upscale nice quiet restaurant. I love food, adventures, being boujie as hell.

Describe yourself using 3 adjectives.
Savage, beautiful and strong.

Any pet peeves?
Disrespect

Where is your favorite vacation destination and why?
Tennessee because I love being in nature and Tennessee mountains and hills and rivers and creeks are my favorite places to be.

Tell us about your tattoos and the meaning behind them.
My dragon tattoo is really popular. I actually just always wanted a dragon tattoo and not your traditional Chinese dragon. I share my chest piece with my sister. My arm sleeve is dedicated to animals because I love animals and some of the details have significant meaning to me. My bows are for cystic fibrosis awareness because my sister has it. Lastly, My left side piece says "Custom Built" because I'm a custom breed.

Congrats on your Playboy feature! What does this mean to you?
This means more magazines in the future! It has inspired me to shoot for more of them!

'HOW
T
COMES
TRUE'

A Timely Talk
With Phoebe
Bridgers

Punisher, Bridgers's eerily prophetic new album, came out last week but feels like it was written within the past month. So does its "bio," written by *In the Dream House* author Carmen Maria Machado. Read on as the two artists conjure their ghosts

INTRODUCTION BY **JAMES RICKMAN**

The bio that accompanies *Punisher*, the new album by Phoebe Bridgers, contains no backstory, no direct references to the artist's work, no case for why you should buy or stream it. It's a two-page work of fiction set in a haunted house, which makes sense considering it was written by Carmen Maria Machado, whose books *In the Dream House* and *Her Body and Other Parties* use odd formal constraints (one story consists of 272 imagined scenes from *Law & Order: SVU*) to take on the elusive and often violent nature of desire.

Titled "Yesterday, Tomorrow" and set in a small domicile called the House of Punishment, the bio makes actual biographical exposition feel lazy, but here goes: Phoebe Bridgers is a Los Angeles–bred 25-year-old whose first album, 2017's Stranger in the Alps, established her as an artist whose lyrics deserve comparison with the greats of the past six decades. (The list of famous Bridgers admirers and collaborators is impressive but much less interesting than her own story.) Led by the single "Garden Song," Punisher takes the folkie backbone of her early work and ups the stakes. The production is bigger and more eclectic, and the words build toward an apocalypse crowded with friends, ghosts, aliens and MAGA bros. The album closer, "I Know the End," is breathtaking—literally, judging by the isolated gasps in its last few seconds.

In early June, Playboy got Bridgers and Machado on the phone to talk about the bio and the album that inspired it—and Bridgers's remotely directed, camgirl-inspired PLAYBOY shoot. Along the way they got into spirituality, art as prophecy, J.K. Rowling and, of course, the year's overlapping crises.

PLAYBOY: "Yesterday, Tomorrow" is partly based on a conversation the two of you had in March, when the world was a very different place. What's it like reading it now?

BRIDGERS: It was funny, because we didn't have a direction, it was just like, let's see what happens. I was not trapped in my house when we had that interview, and now I'm trapped in my house, and everyone's like, g"Well, clearly your record is about quarantine." So that's been wild. When I first read [the bio] I was like, "Wow, this is a beautiful piece of writing." One of my best friends was like, "If I knew that Phoebe Bridgers fan fiction was a job, I would have quit my day job years ago." And then upon reading it again in the context of right now, I'm just like, "What the fuck? What the fuck?" I'm trapped here. This is the House of Punishment. It's crazy.

MACHADO: I keep getting asked about my story g"Inventory" from my first book, because it's about a pandemic. People are like, "How did you know?" Other writers who have written about pandemics are getting questions like that too. And I'm always like, "Well, if you're a person who pays attention and you're interested in certain themes, it makes sense that prescience is a normal thing in art."

BRIDGERS: Definitely. Weirdly, some of the record is about how art comes true.

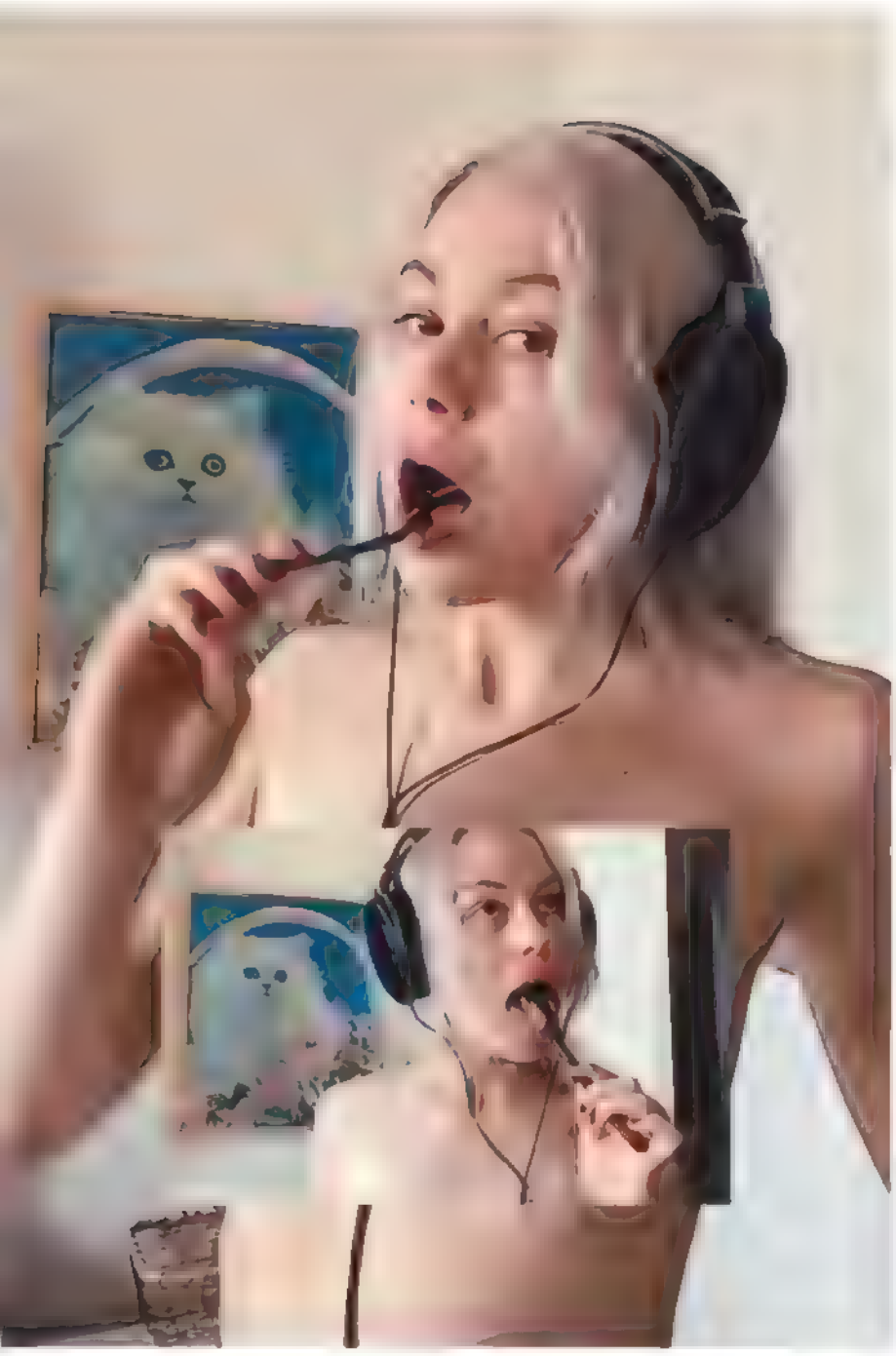
MACHADO: I feel like we covered this when we were having our talk for the bio. I was talking about tarot and how I don't believe in predicting the future in a magical sense, but that tarot is the way of mapping your subconscious.

BRIDGERS: This is my favorite intersection of science and magic: looking at a bunch of tarot cards and being like, g"Of course my life is going to fall apart in two weeks," when it's actually just your subconscious that knows it to be true. I think so much science aligns with that at a certain point. I dated this kid in high school who would end up going to MIT on a full-ride scholarship for math. We had lunch when he was in grad school and he was like, m"Well, basically what we're working on right now is time travel." And I'm like, "Oh, there is just a point where math and science just become magic." The more you find out, the more mystical it is, and I think that's what's so fun.

PLAYBOY: Both of you tend to put a lot of ghosts in your work. Do you believe in them?

BRIDGERS: I feel like I'm too excited by ghosts to believe in ghosts. I want supernatural stuff to happen to me so bad that it just doesn't. Like the minute I stop giving a shit, something will float through the wall, and I'll be like, g"Oh, yeah, it's a ghost." That's my dream.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DAVIS BATES**



MACHADO: Oh, yeah?

BRIDGERS: Even though I was so doubtful—even Santa Claus, since the beginning of time, I've been like, g"No way"—I just wanted someone to prove to me that there was an out; I wanted to believe something. I was so jealous of religious people because it was like, you go to sleep every night thinking, "There is an unseen force taking care of me," and I've never really felt that. I would probably, in the Matrix, take the religion pill if it meant I could sleep easy. So I have a song called "Chinese Satellite," and the metaphor is that you're looking at the sky, and there aren't even stars, and you're like, "All right, I'll settle for this giant piece of hardware in the sky." It's always felt like that's my relationship to religion: I'm going to try this because it's not really working with other stuff.

MACHADO: I don't believe in ghosts, but I would give my left arm to just be like, all right, ghosts are real, magic is possible, cryptoids exist. I would love to be in that world

PLAYBOY: How does mainstream spirituality make its way into your work?

MACHADO: I was raised in the Methodist church, which is a super mainstream middle-of-the-road denomination that is probably about to schism over the issue of gay marriage. But while I was in high school, I fell in with a gang of evangelicals because I wanted to feel something, and I felt like the evangelicals really felt something super strongly. But I also remember thinking, "Okay, if you believe in God and angels and demons, I guess then you believe that all this other crazy supernatural shit in the Bible is real." I don't know. I was a teenager, and I really wanted to feel something as an adult, I figured out ways to do that without religion or magic—but I feel like that is a symptom of a desire for a kind of magic.

BRIDGERS: I actually have a song on my record about that. I was not really raised religious. I think my mom tried for like two seconds, but it was just not happening The closest I ever got was crying on my 11th birthday when I didn't get a Hogwarts letter.

My most literal lyrics sometimes sound like my spookiest. My imagination is not as creative as my reality.

PLAYBOY: Love and romance can be hard to locate on the album. There's that moment in "Garden Song" that also appears in the bio: "And when I find you / You touch my leg, and I insist / But I wake up before we do it." How do they fit into the House of Punishment?

BRIDGERS: I think love has really been a changing form for me in my adulthood. There isn't as much of a script for friendship, so I think the lines kind of blur on the record between romance and platonic friendship. They're kind of becoming the same thing to me. Sometimes I'll be like, "I'm going to write a song about my friend," and then I end up with this very obvious Starbucks love song.

MACHADO: [*laughs*] Sorry, a Starbucks love song?

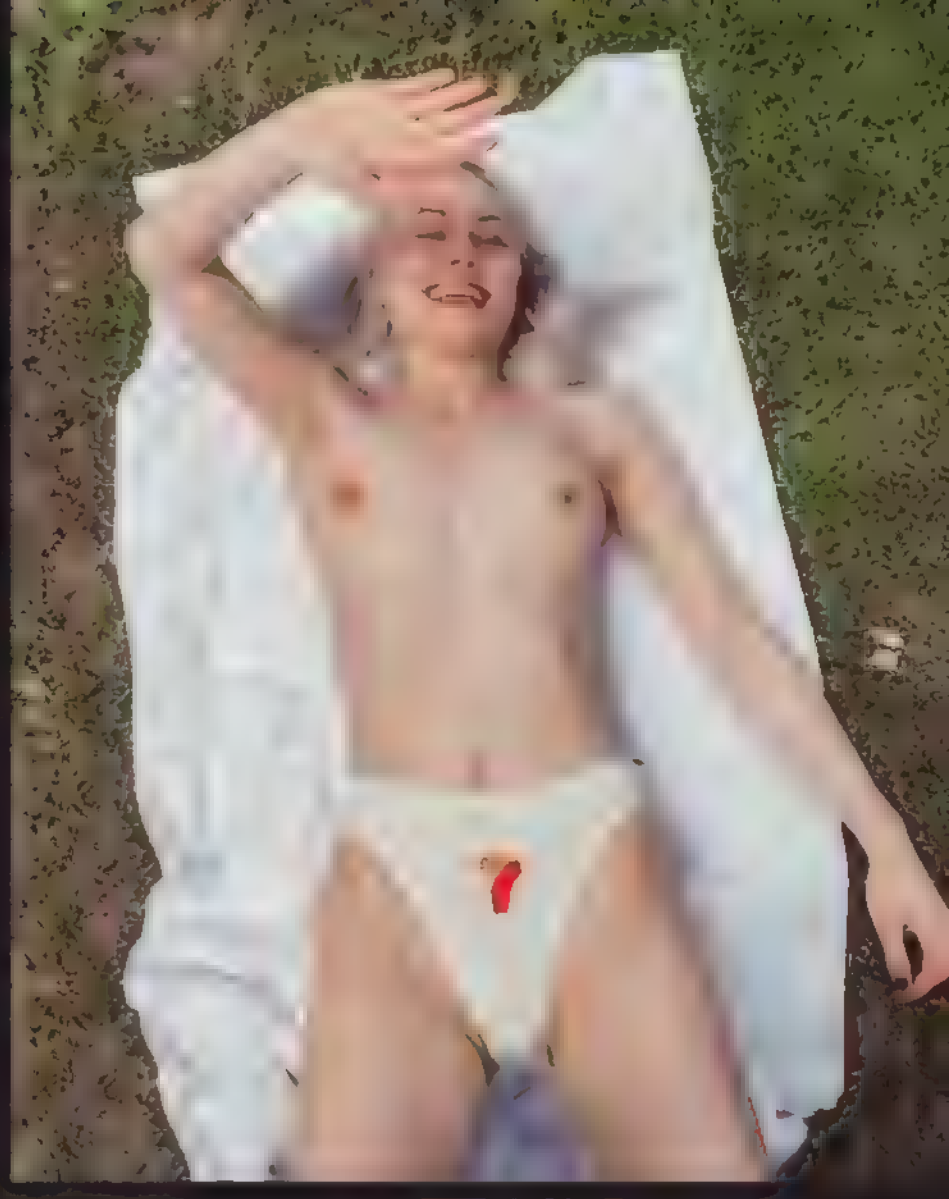
BRIDGERS: I don't know, like a Jason Mraz song. My corniest songs that are the least fraught are about my friends. Actually, this is a conundrum too: My most literal lyrics sometimes sound like my spookiest. In g"Garden Song," the line "The doctor put her hands over my liver and told me my resentment is getting smaller"—that was a nutritionist in Los Angeles who literally did that to me. My imagination is not as creative as my reality.

PLAYBOY: The bio contains some portentous lines toward the end: g"Everyone knows the world is ending. They've been told as much, and they can see it in the streets, and they know the world is irreparably fucked, but most importantly they feel it among themselves; they know this goodness cannot last forever." Do you think that passage speaks at all to the events of the past two weeks?

MACHADO: I mean, it's sort of what I was saying before about prescience. I think that anyone looking at the world with any kind of self-awareness and empathy can see that a lot of systems are fundamentally broken. If you don't think that, you are extremely lucky and very privileged and I'm not really interested in what you have to say. But the different ways it's broken are going to be more or less obvious to different people depending on what you're talking about. Right now we're experiencing a very concentrated conversation around race and policing and then larger conversations about race, the way that we had a conversation about Me Too two years ago, where gender was at the center of things. Whether or not you think that they will make a long-term difference is anyone's guess. I am a little pessimistic, but also I feel like on this particular issue of how black folks are able to live in our society, it's not really up to me to say if I feel pessimistic or optimistic. All I can do is hope things get better and do what I can with the talents and abilities that I have. But I feel like people have different levels of optimism or pessimism around things like racism or sexism or homophobia or transphobia, and right now we're getting it from all sides. Speaking of getting your Hogwarts letter—

BRIDGERS: Oh my God.

MACHADO: I could go on and on about J.K. Rowling in particular. But what's weirdly illustrative about her is that she's obviously a super privileged and fucked-up person



and is wearing that in a lot of ways, but it doesn't, I think, diminish what her art has meant for a lot of people. Other writers have publicly shown themselves to be bigots, and that can be true even while their art means something to lots of people. It illustrates the many ways in which art has its own life or energy but is a little separated from the artist. If you create a thing, until it's out you can fuck with it as much as you want. Phoebe, you know this.

BRIDGERS: Yeah.

MACHADO: But at some point it's out, and then you can't fix it. You can't change it. It is. It's like a separate thing from you, and it has nothing to do with you anymore; it has to do with all the people who are having conversations with it now and for all of human history, until we destroy ourselves. But also it's sort of beautiful because it's not really about you anymore. And I feel like that's actually useful for artists, because it allows you to move on and do other things. But I think it's also useful for readers or listeners who can say, "This means something to me, and that has nothing to do with J.K. Rowling as a person," or any particular artist as a person or a human being in all their fucked-up ways. It just gets to be its own thing.

BRIDGERS: I think there are certain people whose identities are so wrapped up in being the underdog, like J.K. Rowling. Like, "I'm a woman and I've been belittled for my ideas, I was rejected from each publishing house and my success is this big victory against all odds," but somewhere there's a black woman trying to do that who we never heard from. And the idea that J.K. Rowling is more privileged than other people is clearly so uncomfortable for her and feels like an attack. I think a lot of artists are like, g"Wait, wait, wait, I didn't have a lot. I fought the power too! It was hard for me too!" And it's like, "Yeah, but your skin color was never a part of it. Your gender identity was never a part of it." When equality feels like an attack, it's just so wild. All you have to do is step the fuck back. It's so hard for people to just shut up and realize it's not their time.

PLAYBOY: Have you guys been marching or otherwise participating in the protests?

BRIDGERS: I've been marching, which was so weird. I don't judge anybody for avoiding marches because of quarantine, because it's kind of impossible: Everybody's wearing masks, but with the police presence there looming and being fucking terrifying, it's like everybody's even closer together than they would be if it was just a peaceful protest, without police. L.A. is its own brand of fucked. The LAPD has such a bloody history that I only really knew half of before going to marches. And then going and hearing like 10 different moms tell their stories about their kids being killed in ways that were not filmed, I had a very predictable reaction: g"Oh my God, I knew it was happening, but I didn't know it was happening." So it felt good to kind of open my eyes to the way that every single community is affected in the same way by a broken system.

It's super weird making music that has nothing to do with race relations or what's going on in the country and using it as a tool, but I feel so lucky to be able to do it; I feel uniquely qualified to open some people's eyes. I'll post "Black Lives Matter" and get someone being like, p"Hey, watch your mouth," or, "Your cop fans are sad right now." And I'm like, "Fuck you. Quit your job." Like, I'm sorry if I don't make music for you. It's just so weird that my perspective is radical to some people. It's tempting to think, "Oh, I'm preaching to the choir; nobody who listens to my music disagrees with me politically." And then I realized that's not true. I said, "Fuck Donald Trump" in Salt Lake City once and got total silence—at my own sold-out show. I'm like, "Do you guys not pay attention? 'Fuck Donald Trump' is the least radical thing I've said, ever." So I think people are realizing how many people with enormous blind spots exist right now. It feels like even the little that I'm doing is doing something, because those people are kind of everywhere.

PLAYBOY: Last question: Phoebe, have you told Carmen about the Women of 7-Eleven shoot you originally had in mind for this story?

BRIDGERS: I hadn't. It's so epic. It's basically an advertisement for how normal people can be hot. It's actual people who work at 7-Eleven, these cute girls behind the counter—and then naked photos in trucker hats and stuff. It's truly beautiful and inspiring. And I really wanted to do it, but then they were like, g"7-Eleven might not be down with that anymore."

PLAYBOY: The story is actually that they stopped stocking the magazine, so the pictorial was Playboy's fuck-you to 7-Eleven.

BRIDGERS: Well, fuck 7-Eleven then.

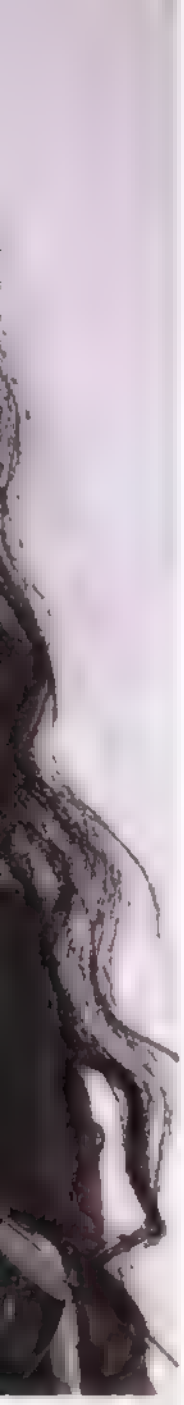
MACHADO: That is really smart.

BRIDGERS: But where we landed is camming, which is close to my heart. As a millennial, it's kind of ingrained. And with the quarantine, you have to give yourself specific guidelines. I think we're going to get creative with our restrictions, which is going to be fun.

Black Sex Workers Matter

Why you should care about what the adult industry is doing in this moment

BY **ANITA LITTLE**



Tonight, adult industry heavyweights Lotus Lain and Ana Foxxx will be taking over Playboy's Instagram Live platform to talk about race, an issue that's been at the forefront of everyone's mind for the past several weeks (assuming you're white, of course—a reminder that black people think about race their entire lives). Porn is a billion-dollar industry with countless consumers, and yet so much of what happens in the industry is under-examined due to our society's skittish attitude toward sex.

That means racism, along with sexism and a lot of other p'isms,' has been allowed to fester unchecked. In the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests sweeping the globe, many industries from tech to publishing are facing a well-deserved reckoning, and the adult space has been no different. First it was a trickle of stories from black performers about navigating discrimination and marginalization in the industry. Then that trickle turned into a flood as black performer after black performer started calling out the industry's shortcomings when it came to addressing anti-black racism. In advance of the panel we're hosting with Lain and Foxxx, we wanted to give you five reasons why you should be paying attention to what the porn industry does in this moment.

1. Racial hierarchies in porn help to perpetuate racial hierarchies in our daily lives through the politics of desirability.

Black features have long stood outside of society's accepted definition of beauty, and most of the narratives that we've constructed around what is attractive or desirable center whiteness. Psychological studies have proven that from a young age, we're all programmed by our environment to see lighter skin as more favorable and see darker skin as a"the other." The common practice of prominent white actresses in porn being paid significantly more than their usual rate to do an "interracial" scene with a black man or refusing to work with black men at all is a prime example of this. "Interracial" in the adult industry almost always refers to a white or white-adjacent female actress doing a scene with a black man, setting up a spectrum of value that places a premium on being a white woman and dehumanizes blackness.

When we say black lives matter, it doesn't just mean the black lives that society finds respectable, it means black lives period, and that includes black sex workers.

2. When porn is such an economic and cultural behemoth and gets a free pass to be racist, it encourages other industries to follow suit.

Part of the reason that racist tropes in adult content are overlooked is that the entire industry markets itself on the taboo. Whatever your kink is, there will likely be a couple thousand results that pop up when you type it into Pornhub's search bar. Into toes? Slapping? Felching? There's a scene for you. And though there's nothing wrong with having sexual kinks, there is something wrong when racism is your sexual kink. Not just porn producers but porn consumers have to bear responsibility for the glut of racially offensively porn. Consumers decide the market, and the porn market should be treated no different from other markets. If your favorite television show started spewing out racist jokes or scenes that played into stereotypes, you would likely stop watching that show. When porn consumers accept and thereby normalize racism in the industry, we give up our power to impact change in how capitalistic industries operate.

3. Racism in porn serves to keep black performers underpaid and siloed into limiting categories.

When a black performer does any type of scene, it can be guaranteed that the marketing copy will heavily emphasize their race, often in crass ways. When white women perform an anal scene, it gets to just be called an anal scene. But when a black woman does it, suddenly it's an all-caps p"big booty ebony whore begs for anal" or some other equally demeaning caption that capitalizes on harmful stereotypes about black women's sexuality. Whiteness gets to be the sexual default, while blackness is siloed into a fetishized subcategory. This dichotomy makes it easy for studios to tokenize or outright reject black performers due to their race or compensate them less than their white counterparts.

4. It also puts black female performers at a heightened risk for sexual harassment or exploitation.

As a direct result of centuries of racially supremacist conditioning, white women are inherently seen as delicate, innocent and worthier of protection. Black women have been socio-historically robbed of their femininity or womanhood, and are often expected to be p"stronger" or more tolerant of abuse. This can create a hostile professional environment for black actresses who often walk onto porn sets with less negotiating power and more vulnerability. A predatory producer might feel more comfortable crossing boundaries with a black actress that they would never try with a white actress. This isn't to say that white women don't encounter discrimination or sexual violence in the porn industry, but when they do, it's not because of their race.

5. We should fundamentally care about all sex workers because sex worker rights are human rights.

Sex workers are already devalued in society, and mistreatment of them is often characterized as an p"occupational hazard" that they should just accept. It's why anti-sex worker legislation like SESTA-FOSTA is able to pass with no one batting an eyelash even though it disproportionately puts sex workers of color, LGBT sex workers and trans sex workers in greater danger. When we say black lives matter, it doesn't just mean the black lives that society finds respectable, it means black lives period, and that includes black sex workers.

WILL WEED BE *PRO SPORTS'* NEXT MVP?

Many top-level athletes turn to cannabis for pain relief, despite the fact not all leagues permit its use. That could change soon

BY **KEVIN E.G. PERRY**

Sitting behind a desk covered in hemp rolling papers and glass jars full of bud, Al Harrington is explaining that he never thought he'd grow up to be a stoner. As a teenager in New Jersey, the six-foot-nine power forward had his heart set on an NBA career. Back then, before he was leading the line for teams including the Indiana Pacers, the Golden State Warriors and the New York Knicks, his grandmother would constantly remind him that chasing his basketball dream meant staying well away from illegal drugs.

"I remember my grandma kicking my aunts and uncles out of the house for even smelling like weed," says Harrington, now 40 years old and the founder and CEO of his own Los Angeles–based cannabis brand, Viola. "I was taught it was a gateway drug. I'd see guys strung out on the corner, and they'd tell you that cannabis is what started them down that path. I was smart enough to know I didn't want no part of that."

It was a surprise, then, when Harrington made it to the NBA and realized that many of his teammates—70 to 80 percent, by his estimation—were using cannabis in secret. "I saw professional athletes smoking weed and being productive," he says, raising his eyebrows. "We're talking about the best players on my team."

Cannabis remains on the NBA's list of banned substances, but perceptions surrounding the drug are changing across professional sports. At the end of 2019, the MLB announced that it would be removing cannabis from baseball's list of "drugs of abuse." The NHL also no longer classifies cannabis as a banned substance. This March, the NFL followed suit when, as part of a new collective-bargaining agreement, the league agreed to do away with suspensions for football players who test positive for cannabis. Harrington believes the NBA won't be far behind. "I think they'll wait to see how it affects the NFL, and I don't think it will affect the NFL at all," he says. "The NBA can't be the only league that doesn't change their rules. They'll look kinda crazy."

Ironically, Harrington's own cannabis awakening came thanks to the same person who'd first warned him away from it—his grandmother Viola, from whom his company takes its name. In 2010 Harrington signed with the Denver Nuggets, which meant he and his family were living in Colorado at a time when cannabis had been legalized for medicinal use. His grandmother was suffering from severe glaucoma, and after pharmaceutical treatments proved useless, Harrington read that she might have better results with the drug she still referred to as "reefer."

"She was always in pain, and she couldn't see," remembers Harrington. "Cannabis literally cleared her eyesight up. The first thing she did was read her Bible. For me that meant a lot, because my grandmother was so hard on any of her children using any kind of drugs. For her to be open enough to try it, and then to have that relief, and then the first thing she does is pick up her Bible? Those were signs being thrown my way."

But it wasn't until 2012, when Harrington went in for knee surgery and ended up with a staph infection, that he began to understand that "reefer" might benefit him as well. "I had to have four surgeries in a two-week span," he says. "I was on all kinds of pain meds, and obviously it wasn't agreeing with the way I felt. I'd be constipated, all kinds of shit. Somebody introduced me to CBD first. The next year, I started smoking. For me, it was about managing pain, but it was also because when I get high it allows me to deal with a lot of stuff mentally. Anything that goes wrong, the first thing I reach for is cannabis. I believe the plant can heal everything."

For many professional athletes, cannabis is more than just a lifestyle choice—it's a way of managing pain and inflammation that some feel is healthier than the truckload of pain meds they're usually prescribed. Eugene Monroe spent seven seasons in the NFL as an offensive tackle for the Jacksonville Jaguars and the Baltimore Ravens and became used to riding what pros jokingly refer to as "the T train"—a line of players waiting to drop their pants before each game so they can get the powerful painkiller Toradol injected into their backsides.

"We laughed and joked about it as players, but many of us were gonna get that injection because it essentially made you Superman," explains Monroe. "It masked all the pain." If that sounds like a good thing, Monroe points out the lack of feeling could be terrifying. "Back in college, I tore my labrum [the cartilage that lines the shoulder joint] in a game versus UConn at home in Virginia," he says. "I could tell that something was wrong with my shoulder. It really wasn't functioning like I needed it to, but there was no pain because I'd already had a Toradol shot for my knees. I just got wrapped up and went back out there."

Like Harrington, in his early days as a player Monroe avoided cannabis because of the stigma around it and the threat of punishment for using a banned substance. However, as his injuries mounted, so too did the number of prescription pills he had to take each day. Monroe says it got to the point where he was taking pills just to deal with the side-effects of other pills, so he started to look for alternative forms of treatment. "For

Monroe became the first active NFL player to challenge the league's ban on cannabis.

me, the major benefits of cannabis are as an anti-inflammatory and the relief from pain, headaches and other concussion symptoms that I still have years after suffering a bunch of them," he says. "I went from scheduling X amount of pills throughout each day to eliminating all of them. Now that I use cannabis, the only pills I take are vitamins and minerals. There's no more pharmaceuticals."

In March 2016, Monroe became the first active NFL player to challenge the league's ban on cannabis. He retired four months later at the age of 29, citing concerns over the amount of head trauma he'd sustained during his career. He'd like to see more research into the potential that cannabis may have to treat chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), the neurodegenerative disease that has been identified in the brains of more than 100 deceased former NFL players. "We don't have any clinical data yet," he points out. "But as laws are changing, research is finally opening up. We're able to study much more dangerous drugs in a clinical environment, so it's about time we looked at the potential of cannabis as well."

Dr. Ware believes that cannabis legalization in Canada and in many American states should lead to an increase in the amount of research being done into the possible benefits of cannabis for top-level athletes—benefits that many former players already swear by. Matt Lombardi is a regular CBD user who was a professional hockey player in the New Jersey Devils and Pittsburgh Penguins minor league systems until his career ended early after he suffered a bad concussion. "I was getting the puck, and as I turned I got smacked in the face with an elbow," he remembers. "I had symptoms for six or eight months, so I missed half the season."

Lombardi is now such an evangelist for CBD that, along with former Chicago White Sox minor league pitcher Kevin Moran, he has co-founded a CBD wellness brand called beam. "Over the next five to 10 years, there's going to be so much more science and data coming out that it's really going to disrupt Big Pharma," Lombardi predicts. "I think it's really going to have a positive impact on how people think about their bodies and the endocannabinoid systems we all have."

For years the potential health benefits of cannabis for athletes have been downplayed, in part thanks to the same stigma that made Al Harrington believe he'd end up a junkie if he touched cannabis. But now professional leagues may finally be catching up to what many players have known for a long time: Cannabis seems to help.

Back in Los Angeles, Harrington says there's no reason cannabis use shouldn't be accepted across all professional sports. "If fans and team owners say they care about what's best for the players, then they have to allow it," he says. "If they've got to do research, pay for the research so you can scientifically prove it, but there's more than enough stories out here of how cannabis has helped a lot of people. It's just time."

Marvel Star CHLOE BENNET Reflects on Seven Years of 'S.H.I.E.L.D.'

The woman behind Daisy "Skye/Quake" Johnson talks diversity, time travel and her emotional last day on set

BY **GIL MACIAS**

All good things must come to an end including, to the dismay of countless of Marvel fans, *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, whose final season premieres this week on ABC.

Developed and co-created by Joss Whedon (*The Avengers, Avengers: Age of Ultron*), the series is produced by Marvel Television and ABC Studios as a small-screen outpost of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. It explores the inner workings of the S.H.I.E.L.D. organization (Strategic Homeland Intervention, Enforcement, and Logistics Division) and has introduced us to new agents such as Melinda May, played by Ming-Na Wen, and the enigmatic Daisy "Skye/Quake" Johnson, played by rising star Chloe Bennet.

From her mysterious origins to her many tragic love story lines, Daisy has become a standout character and fan favorite. (Don't worry, Fitz and Simmons; we love you too.) Her transformation from the awkward rookie agent Skye to the formidable Inhuman known as Quake has been a rewarding journey for loyal viewers of the show and for Bennet herself.

Prior to *S.H I.E.L.D.*, Bennet had a brief stint as a pop star in China. (Look up the video for her "Uh Oh" single under her former name, Chloe Wang; it's a hoot.) She would later shift her focus to acting and land a co-host gig on TeenNick's The Nightlife, followed by a recurring role as Hailey on ABC's Nashville. But her character on *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* was the dream role that catapulted her into the spotlight gazed upon by legions of Marvel fans. Since *S.H.I.E L.D.* debuted in 2013, Bennet has also nabbed lead roles in MGM's 1980s-set musical rom-com Valley Girl and voiced Yi in the animated DreamWorks feature Abominable—a role special to her because of its representation of Asian Americans. Next up she'll star in the drama 5 Years Apart, which currently has a to-be-determined release date. Bennet is also the co-founder of RUN (Represent. Us. Now.), an organization devoted to being a political and cultural voice for the Asian American and Pacific Islander community

With *S.H.I.E.L D.*'s swan song arriving in a matter of weeks, a major chapter of Bennet's life is coming to a close—something she's still coming to terms with. Ben-

net, who like us is currently practicing social distancing, spoke with Playboy about her emotional final days on the show that made her a star. She also discussed how her own half-Asian heritage made its way into the story line, along with her thoughts on diversity in Hollywood, time travel and whether she believes in extraterrestrial life.

PLAYBOY: Let's get the obvious question out of the way. How are you handling this whole quarantine situation?

BENNET: I'm just doing the best I can. I wake up, panic, eat breakfast, panic. Scroll through Instagram, panic. Try to journal and do something healthy, panic. I think that's normal. I do puzzles now—like a thousand-piece puzzle. And it's honestly harder than I thought. I'm just trying to not be panicked about the fact that I panicked, and I think that's been the best way of doing it. But honestly, seven seasons of *S.H.I.E.L.D.* prepared me for something like this. It feels like we're living out a real-life *S.H.I.E.L.D.* episode, so luckily I'm relatively used to it.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk some *S.H.I.E.L.D.* I don't know what the script-reveal process is like, but what was your first reaction to reading the script for the very last episode?

BENNET: I'm almost always the last person to see or read anything. We get them very last-minute. I actually have video footage of me before reading it. I don't know why I'm super dramatic, but I vividly remember the last script. I remember seeing it pop up in my e-mail—to have that finally pop up after seven years, knowing it was the last one, was pretty surreal. I kind of made a moment out of it: I lit a candle, I got a glass of wine, I read it, I cried. It was odd knowing we still had to shoot it, and it's a big, big episode. *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* moved very quickly. Quarantine has been interesting, because it's giving me a lot of time to reflect on how crazy, chaotic and special that experience was.

"I vividly remember the last script. I remember seeing it pop up in my e-mail—to have that finally pop up after seven years, knowing it was the last one, was pretty surreal."

PLAYBOY: Overall, are you satisfied with Daisy Johnson's ending?

BENNET: I would say I'm pretty happy with it. Obviously it's an ensemble show, so I'm invested in the other characters as much as I am with Daisy. It's really hard to wrap up everyone's characters, but they did a really sweet and wonderful job at giving the actors and the fans some closure for each character. And they do it in a cool way. I think for anyone who has been watching the show since season one, it's a very rewarding ending.

PLAYBOY: Can you hint at whether Daisy finally finds true love? She's had some bad luck with men

BENNET: It's an understatement to say she's had bad luck. I'm pretty sure all her boyfriends have died or been murdered or tried to murder her or, like, kill her parents, something like that. I'm rooting for her to find love, for sure. There's that classic saying: If you can't find love in the present, you time-travel to every decade and try to find it there. And that might work out for her. We'll have to wait and see.

PLAYBOY: You've had some surprise visitors over the years, including characters Nick Fury, Peggy Carter from *Captain America* and Lady Sif from *Thor*. Since this is the last season, are you guys going big in the cameo department?

BENNET: What's fun about the show is that our fans are so much more interested in what's happening with the lead characters now. Obviously we have a lot of people come back who have been on the show in past seasons. During the first season we got asked that a lot. Like "What Avenger is going to come by?" Now it's "Are Fitz and Simmons going to make it?" Or "What's going to happen with Yo-Yo and Mack, or Coulson and Daisy?" So it's been fun to see different versions of characters we've been with for seven years. I'm sure we have certain scenes everyone will come to know and love once the finale airs—scenes where everyone was together. It's surreal. Fans are probably going to be more excited about that than anything else.

PLAYBOY: You talked about how emotional reading the final script was. How emotional was the very last day on set with the cast and crew?

BENNET: Oh my God. It was wild. It was kind of a bummer because I was shooting fight sequences the whole time, and fights are the worst thing to shoot when you're emotional. It's like opposite sides of the brain. I was basically on the verge of tears all day, and it was emotionally draining. We had our wrap parties the same day. So as I was shooting these fights, we literally had actors from every season just showing up. It was a good 20-hour day; I'm still tired from it. And then cleaning out my trailer and walking off those stages—we shot on those stages for the past seven years, and like two days later they took them down. That meant it was really the end, and it has taken me this entire time in quarantine to kind of come to terms with that.

PLAYBOY: You've gone through rigorous martial-arts training for those action sequences. Now that it's all over, will you stick with the training regimen so you're always prepared for other action roles?

BENNET: Right after we wrapped shooting, I was like, "I never want to sweat again in my life." It was so much fun to shoot those scenes, but it was a lot of hard work. I don't think I realized how much of a toll it took on my body. I'm fighting in heels, and you're on your feet all day. That was physically draining. I'm not going to lie: It's been nice to not move that much in quarantine. We moved at such a fast pace that we would have about 45 minutes to go over a fight, and then we'd go straight into shooting it. But that just makes me prepared for anything. I feel like any movie could come my way and I would know how to do it, just because of that. It's so ingrained. But I will say it's been really nice to trade in my Quake suit for a tracksuit and watch Netflix.

PLAYBOY: Do you think we've seen the last of Daisy Johnson/Quake? Back in October Brie Larson said that some of the female stars of the MCU were bugging Kevin Feige about an all-female superhero movie. Would you be game for that?

BENNET: If they would have me, I would love to be part of that. She's an Avenger in certain comic books, so I would absolutely love that. With the Marvel universe you can never say never. Look at Clark Gregg: He has died probably 800 million times as Coulson and comes back to life. I'll always have room in my heart for playing Daisy. I'd be very excited if that opportunity came to me.

PLAYBOY: You star in the new comedy-musical remake of Valley Girl. After seven years of Marvel action, are you branching out into other genres?

BENNET: Definitely. I would love to. People don't realize how physical the role of Daisy was because we have stunt doubles, who are incredible, but I pride myself on doing all my own stunts, so it was incredibly physical. Honestly, I can't even believe I got cast to play a superhero. That's kind of hilarious. I have six brothers, so I was always terrible at sports, which is why I got into acting. I actually loved and always wanted to do comedies and romantic comedies. Those are the things I love to watch, so I will definitely be moving forward with something a little different maybe something where I don't get beat up every episode.

PLAYBOY: In this season of *S.H.I.E.L.D.* time travel plays a big role. You get to go back to the 1930s and play dress-up in costumes from that era.

BENNET: It's so much fun.

PLAYBOY: If you had the opportunity to legitimately go back in time, are you the type who would change anything, or would you leave everything as is?

BENNET: That's a good question. It's one we struggle with on the show, but absolutely. There's an inside joke among my friends that I'm obsessed with period pieces. As a kid I would be so mad that I couldn't go back in time. A big part of why I wanted to start acting is because it's pretty much the closest thing to feeling like you're going back in time.

PLAYBOY: In Valley Girl you basically got to teleport back to the 1980s.

BENNET: As a half-Asian girl, I always thought they weren't going to necessarily need me in a Renaissance movie. Things have changed now, but I thought I was never going to have the opportunity to be in these period pieces. Now with *S.H.I.E.L.D.*, I get to skip around and basically do several different decades. Every episode was so much fun. It just changes the energy on set. All the props are different; the set is completely different. To go through the specific looks and decide which kind of character, what kind of girl I would be in each time period, and what kind of style I would have. There are a lot of things I would probably want to do if I really did go back in time. But it's also a dangerous thing to mess with.

PLAYBOY: On *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* you've encountered robots, artificial intelligence, aliens and other extraterrestrial life. What's your personal belief about alien life?

BENNET: I definitely think there's life out there. I don't know who said it, but what's the quote? "Two possibilities exist: Either we are alone in the universe or we are not. Both are equally terrifying." I love that, and we deal with that a bit in this season. But I do believe in aliens. They're in my dreams all the time. Listen, quarantine has me dreaming some weird shit, to be honest.

PLAYBOY: On your Instagram and Twitter accounts you've been vocal about diversity and equal opportunity in Hollywood. The cast of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* has been pretty diverse since the show debuted in 2013, and Marvel even altered Quake's backstory to fit your real-life heritage. You voiced one of the leading roles in DreamWorks' Abominable, which features mostly Asian animated characters. And now Marvel has its first big Asian superhero coming in next year's Shang-Chi. Are you overall satisfied with the progress so far?

BENNET: We have more work to do, because it's still a topic. Once it's not a topic, our work is done. That's going to take a long time, but we're definitely taking steps in the right direction. People should be cast because they're good at what they do and are right for the role. And that's that. Part of that is a systemic issue: Certain actors or certain people get more experience and can grow and become better because they were allowed to have that experience. So it's really about giving people the chance, especially Asian actors. For me, as a mixed-Asian actress going into the show, I was really proud that they cast me because I was right for the role. And then within that, they made my character fit me. They really played into that and the Chinese culture of Daisy and the fact that she was half Asian and half white. That's really special.

We need to cater more to things like that to make it more a unique experience rather than forced diversity. People can tell when content is forced. We don't need to do that. Talented actors of all different colors are out there. The more we can come together as a community, whether you're black, white or Asian, the better. I'm proud of what the show has done in that regard, especially being a female character. As much as we want to see Daisy find love, this was definitely a discovery of self for her. And that resonated with a lot of young women. What our show never really did was "Strong female characters, yeah!" It just is. And when things are just the way they are and we're not talking about it, that's when things have changed. No one else could have played Mack but Henry Simmons, and he happens to be black. That's why everyone was so good. And so I hope we go more in that direction.

"Fights are the worst thing to shoot when you're emotional. It's like opposite sides of the brain. I was basically on the verge of tears all day, and it was emotionally draining."

MARVEL

AGENTS OF

S.H.I.E.L.D.

100TH EPISODE CELEBRATION

WR TTEN BY
ANITA LITTLE

FASTING

A new wave in adult content is here; let's just say it's easy on the ears

It's night 47 in quarantine, and it's time for my before-bed routine. Some lemongrass tea, a hit of my favorite hybrid vape, an overwrought skincare regimen and finally some toggling between Instagram, TikTok and Pornhub until the sandman carries me away. But this particular night I'm hoping for a different type of erotic stimulation—one that's a bit meditative rather than the usual vigorous and frenetic. I open the Dipsea app, something that's been bouncing around on my self-pleasure to-do list for months and that I finally have time to pursue.

I pop on my headphones and find an entire library of audio erotica, heavily curated according to sexual scenarios, identities and "heat levels." To be clear, I rarely engage aurally with adult content. For years I watched porn on mute after a horrifying college incident when I realized too late that my earbuds weren't plugged in. I had trained my brain to get off on visuals alone, so I wasn't expecting a lot from an audio erotica app.

The first story I randomly click on is a 15-minute narrative about a tattoo-shop visit turned hookup. I push "play" on the next scene, a yoga session that's hot in more ways than one, and move on to a wet and wild adventure in the rainy Irish countryside. I feel transported each time, and before I know it I've spent an hour swiping through scenes, spellbound.

Wanting to know more about the minds behind this sexual innovation, I decide to call Dipsea co-founder Gina Gutierrez at home in San Francisco, where she's currently quarantined with her partner. I find out Dipsea began—like many great ideas—around two in the morning with close friends and a bottle or two of wine.

"To me, sex is so psychological," says Gutierrez. "The big miss was that people weren't talking about sex in any way related to the mind. It's always very physical. What are you thinking about when you're having sex? What are you thinking about when you're touching yourself?"

Gutierrez began asking her female friends what kind of sexy content they commonly found when they went searching for it. The answers were grim.

"A friend was like, 'I've searched the internet top and bottom, and it's scary out there. You find a lot of stuff that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, and it makes you not want to keep looking.' Those were the kinds of answers we were getting. The problem was so pervasive, and Faye [Keegan, Dipsea's other co-founder] and I just kind of got obsessed with the idea."

The fact that most adult content caters to a male gaze is no secret. (Anyone who has seen long acrylic nails in lesbian porn knows this.) Companies such as Bellesa and X-Art strive to make "porn for women," but the entire genre still assumes that all women get off in the same way: from what we see. Not everyone processes stimuli in the same way, and given how nuanced and layered women's sexuality can be, Gutierrez wanted to completely reimagine what it means to consume erotica.

For the seminal 2011 book A Billion Wicked Thoughts,

The Dipsea engineers curate the experience down to the most minute details: the crinkle of a condom wrapper being ripped open, the soft whoosh of a gown dropping to the floor.

neuroscientists Ogi Ogas and Sai Gaddam examined the internet-search histories of 650,000 people. They discovered a psychological chasm between men and women in terms of how they experience arousal. Men tend to be turned on by visuals and graphics, while women desire more of a narrative connection to the content. Gutierrez says this book became the "foundational document" behind Dipsea and that it's still required reading for all new employees.

"What if we just stopped saying women should be sexual like men?" she asks. "What if we said, 'Maybe there's another way to approach it'? And what if we took a mind-first approach to sexuality?"

They decided audio would be a natural fit.

"There's a quote I read recently that I love—something along the lines of 'Audio is so intimate because it's so closely aligned with how we think our thoughts.' That starts to tap into how personalized the experience can feel, how intimate it can feel, how immersive it can feel, and that's why we decided to tell these stories in audio."

Visual porn places a heavy emphasis on appearance, age, race and body type, splintering off into a million subgenres. It's accommodating in that no matter what you desire, you can likely find visual stimuli for it, but it's limiting in that you can't always employ your imagination. Watching porn for me is like staring at a completed piece of art hanging in a gallery, while listening to audio erotica is more akin to being given a blank coloring book and filling it in myself. I can stay inside the lines or scribble outside them. Both types of consumption are normal; it just depends on what floats your boat.

Shuhan, a Dipsea user in New York, says the app has helped her come to terms with her body in a new way. "As a woman from a conservative culture, to acknowledge and accept the healthy sexuality of a female was hard," she tells Playboy. "Dipsea helps me to explore and understand the most natural and beautiful part of me. I now use the stories to enjoy alone time and even time with my husband."

She adds, "Many times I share the app with my husband, and we use the stories as foreplay. Sometimes it's more of an educational experience you get from guided sessions or informative stories."

The app can also be a boon to those who can't be physically near their partner, providing new ways to connect or just remain sexually satisfied on their own terms. "I'm in a long-distance relationship, and I have my own personal sexuality to tend to," says Aalia, a Los Angeles–based fan of the app. "I was never into erotica, and Dipsea has definitely changed my habits. They're really creative with the scenes they come up with and the quality of the acting and the writing. It's just something I can connect with: It helps make self-pleasure more of an imaginative space."

As Aalia points out, when it comes to creating these audio narratives, there's a high level of production involved, from the scripts to the actors who bring the scenes to life. The Dipsea engineers curate the experience down to the most minute details: the crinkle of a condom wrapper being ripped open, the soft whoosh of a gown dropping to the floor. Combine that with a beautifully designed interface, and the result is an enthralling user experience. Dipsea currently has 230 stories live on the app, with new ones being added each week.

Ellen Ford, an L.A. fashion designer who collaborated with the Dipsea team to write a steamy narrative based on a tailoring appointment, says the main benefit of Dipsea's writing process is "a collection of stories where you see yourself reflected but also feel safe in exploring new genres."

"There's nothing like this out there; nothing comes close," they say of the app.

In addition to erotic storytelling, the app boasts a large collection of sex-education resources from top authorities in the field. There's a how-to on dirty talk hosted by well-known kink educator Tina Horn, an intro to BDSM by professional dominatrix Yin Q and an orgasmic meditation class led by yoga expert Eva Kaczor.

Similar to my experience, more people are beginning to notice the godsend of Dipsea in quarantine. Company stats show that downloads are on the rise and that March—when most states went into lockdown—was the highest-usage month Dipsea has ever had, with a growth of 44 percent from the previous month. As of now, the app has more than 400,000 downloads.

The conversation Dipsea has sparked goes beyond just getting off; it could completely change the way our society looks at sex. Sex is often seen as a vice, something that needs to be measured and moderated. That's why sex toys arrive at our houses in discreet packaging and why we opt for the self-checkout option when buying lubes or condoms at the pharmacy.

Says Gutierrez, "Our job in the past year and a half at Dipsea has been to try to pull sexuality out of vice and push it into wellness. How do we take a space that's loaded with taboo and bad design and bad expectations and male gaze and directly address all of them? Imagine if we talked about sex not in the same category as guns and nicotine but in the same category as meditation and exercise—as things that make your body feel good."

Sounds like a no-brainer, right? Unfortunately, this undertaking has faced serious challenges since its inception. Sexuality, especially as it pertains to women's pleasure, has always been heavily policed, with extra scrutiny thrown in if your sexuality is anything but heteronormative. This is no different in Silicon Valley. In October of last year, Dipsea was kicked out of the Google Play store due to what Dipsea felt was a "fundamental misunderstanding" of what the app is all about. As of February Dipsea is available to Android users once again, but the incident pushed the startup to create a web version of the app that can be used in any browser, making it less reliant on the fickle ecosystem of app stores.

In a more enlightened world, Gutierrez hopes an app like Dipsea would be seen as the hot-and-heavy version of Headspace, the popular mindfulness app.

"Our brains are bombarded in all moments of the day, by all sorts of media, by texts and TikTok and the news," she says. "A lot of people feel stuck in their heads and disconnected from their bodies. Tapping into desire is actually a really interesting way to remember the connection between your head and your body."

The biggest sex organ will always be the mind, and Dipsea allows one to engage with it in a captivating new way. By making the journey of self-knowledge and carnal knowledge one and the same, the app is helping to sculpt a future in which we feel more secure with our bodies and, by extension, ourselves. All we have to do is listen.

Our job at Dipsea has been to try to pull sexuality out of vice and push it into wellness. Imagine if we talked about sex not in the same category as guns and nicotine but in the same category as meditation and exercise."

CYNTHIA NIXON *Pierces* THE VEIL ON A DEFUNCT AMERICAN DREAM

The award-winning actress and activist talks to Playboy about her latest project, ***Stray Dolls***, and the dire straits of the U.S. working class—before the pandemic and now

BY **ANITA LITTLE**

When I call Cynthia Nixon at her home in New York, the state is in its sixth week of quarantine and Governor Andrew Cuomo has just met with President Trump to address the lack of funding for COVID-19 tests. Even though this is a press call for her upcoming indie project *Stray Dolls*, it's impossible not to launch into our respective stay-at-home lives

"I'm homeschooling, like so many parents around the world," she tells me. "Homeschooling is now my middle name."

In addition to keeping up with her nine-year-old son (he's playing the role of Grandpa Joe in his classroom's harrowing Zoom rendition of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory), the Emmy- and Tony-winning actress has been spending a lot of time thinking about her fellow New Yorkers. The pandemic has hit New York the hardest of any state in the country, with the number of confirmed cases nearing 200,000. As a former gubernatorial candidate who mounted a hotly contested challenge to Cuomo in 2018, Nixon doesn't mince words when I ask how she would grade the governor's response to the outbreak.

"I mean, hindsight is always 20/20, but I wish both our governor and our mayor had had a shelter-in-place earlier. I wish they'd closed schools a little earlier. That would've helped a lot," she says.

"Having said that, I think that being on television, communicating with people at a time when there is so little coherent information and telling them the truth is very, very important," she adds, referring to the governor's daily coronavirus briefings that have become a much-needed counterweight to the bewildering statements coming from the White House.

> "One of the things art does is take someone who is behaving terribly and show how you might act similarly if your circumstances were that dire."

An outspoken progressive activist, Nixon has been using her platform, before quarantine and now, to draw attention to the most vulnerable people in her state—immigrants, the homeless, the poor and the incarcerated. (Correctional facilities can be hotbeds of contagion.)

Her career-long dedication to these issues explains her attraction to Stray Dolls, directed by Sonejuhi Sinha and released on VOD last month. Part Thelma and Louise inspired queer love story, part immigration tale and part crime thriller, the film paints a stark portrait of the American dream's underbelly. In it, Nixon takes on a unique role: a sympathetic villain named Una who's a Polish emigre and owner of the seedy Poughkeepsie motel in which our characters toil and flail.

"She's got a lot of ambiguity to her. She is ruthless in a certain way, but I love her because we see she's not winning, right? She's winning compared to some of the people she preys upon. But she's in desperate straits herself," says Nixon.

And then there's the film's heroine, Riz, played by Geetanjali Thapa. Riz is another immigrant, from India in her case, whose murky past and formidable sense of self-preservation go against Hollywood's common characterization of South Asian women as docile and compliant. In the highly stratified pecking order of Una's motel empire, Una's race, legal status and time in America make her slightly better off than Riz, whom she hires as a cleaning woman. Una uses these small advantages to further exploit Riz and push her into a desperate life of crime. Riz's Sisyphean attempts to stay afloat only push fantasies of social mobility further out of reach as the plot takes one hard left after another. Viewers can ditch any hope for a "bootstraps" story.

"This is a survivor, a person of tremendous resources who will choose to survive, even if it means breaking the law," says Nixon of Riz. "Almost every person in the film behaves in a way that we would condemn, right? But I think one of the things art does is take someone who is behaving terribly and show how you might act similarly if your circumstances were that dire."

The feeling of working-class despair is palpable in Stray Dolls. It permeates all the characters, driving them to actions that are difficult to watch. In one of the film's opening scenes, a chain-smoking Una says to Riz, "You work hard, you make it here. You believe that?" One can't tell if it's meant to inspire or condescend.

The timing of the Stray Dolls release also stands as a stark reminder of how many people were already squeezed before the pandemic and are being shoved off the socioeconomic precipice now. More than 30 million Americans have filed for unemployment since mid-March, and the country is on track to experience its highest unemployment rate on record since the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics started collecting monthly data in 1948.

"This moment that we're in, it's not like anything I've ever seen or ever expect to see again. One of the things it does is lay bare all the cracks and fissures that were already there," says Nixon, who has joined the call to cancel rent and mortgage payments during the quarantine. "People who have tons of money are doing just fine, and they're even getting big handouts from the federal government to their companies, whether they need it or not. People who are living

paycheck to paycheck, if they don't work for a week, they can't pay their rent."

Many Americans received $1,200 coronavirus stimulus checks in April, an amount that will likely have to stretch impossibly far given how long some of us have been laid off, furloughed or working with reduced income. Although it's clear to economists and policymakers that a one-time check won't cut it for a months-long pandemic, Democrat-led efforts for additional payments are being stymied.

"What's the alternative? It's not something we can let just happen," Nixon says.

Nixon was an ardent supporter of former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, who was edged out of the race in April and whose platform centered on affordable health care and housing.

"That's a whole other conversation, but I think if people hadn't ganged up on him, he would have been the nominee and he would have defeated Trump. I really sincerely hope that Biden will be able to."

As we end our conversation, Nixon brings up the importance of art like Stray Dolls at a time such as this. It can be escapist, yes, but it can also act as a mirror held up to society, exposing the mendacities and hypocrisies that result in calamity for an entire class of people. It can even ask us to agitate for a fairer world.

"So many of us are just trapped at home," she says. "One of the things we do, other than cooking and cleaning and homeschooling, is turn on the TV. Stray Dolls is a really beautiful piece of art a haunting story that stays with you."

"This moment that we're in, it's not like anything I've ever seen or ever expect to see again. One of the things it does is lay bare all the cracks and fissures that were already there." "

Alesya
ANIS

Model @ALESYA_ANIS

Photography by MAYA SHISHKINA | @SHISHKINA.PHOTO
HMUA KRISTINA NABATNIKOVA | @MAKEUP_QUEENSG
Retouch OLGA DROGAYTCEVA | @DROGAYTCEVA_RETOUCH
Agency WAVEMAGS | @WAVEMAGS

Such an honor to have you as our cover! Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
I'm so excited that I will be on the cover of Playboy Australia November issue!! I think it's really awesome. I'm such a big fan of the magazine. Can't wait to share all the exciting things I'm working on and my sexy pics in the magazine. Thank you for having me.

Tell us something surprising about you?
Actually, I can share a lot of surprising facts about myself. For example, some time ago I found myself in a very stressful situation when I managed to rescue two drowning people. It was pretty challenging but all ended well and now sometimes I can call myself the "lifeguard Malibu ". Also, I fond of all things design-related and can design clothes by myself. I also do charity work for a shelter for sick animals because I really love animals and always want to help them. Let alone, I am very interested in Western esotericism.

Describe yourself in one sentence.
I think I am the person whose charisma attracts positive people with the right energies..

What are some of your hobbies?
I like traveling very much, especially to sunny places with a lot of beautiful beaches, I am collecting unique soft toys and love to spend time drawing.

What Is your biggest turn on?
I am a professional singer and the biggest turn on for me is the music. I am working now on my own album which will include English and Spanish singles.

What turns you off the most?
Nothing can turn me off, I think our world is a great place to be and enjoy life 100%

Describe to us your perfect date.
Beach, sunset, waves of ocean, music, champagne, my love and I.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
Frankly speaking, the biggest challenge for me is to be organized and follow the schedule. I always want to speed things up and can not wait a lot of the time.

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
Take care of yourself and people around you. Follow your dream and never give up.

Playboy Interview

Charles Barkley

A candid conversation with the NBA's fast-breaking big mouth about the rising Suns, stardom, bedlam in Barcelona — and his big butt

INTERVIEW BY **TOM BOSWELL** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **STEVE CONWAY**

Charles Barkley is a human party. He lives in Hotel Barkley—that's what his wife, Maureen, calls their home. He answers the door himself; usually in a sweatsuit, holding a putter, inviting everybody to come inside to join in his favorite parlor game: What will I do next?

"I love to play basketball. I love to have fun. And I love to say what's on my mind," he says. Every day, he makes sure he hits the trifecta.

When you're in Barkley's presence, he dominates the horizon. From his shaved head to his wide grin or profound scowl, he's a one-man weather system, always moving fast and changing configuration, like a sky full of clouds. Will he let the sun shine through or cloud up and rain?

The power of the power forward's appeal is that, as much as any athlete in the world, this Phoenix Sun might do anything. And has. If it costs him $40,000 to speak his mind about a referee, he thinks nothing of it. If he feels that a teammate should be knocked down in practice to test his toughness, so be it. He once ordered his NBA coach to take a player out of the game. Of course, his nicknames for that coach and his assistant were p"Little Knucklehead" and "Big Knucklehead."

In Barcelona, the U.S. Olympic Committee begged him to tone down his comments so the whole world wouldn't end up hating both him and the U.S. After Barkley belted a skinny Angolan player, he quipped, p"The guy probably hadn't eaten in a few weeks." Instead of apologizing, Barkley told the USOC to stop acting jealous; he added that America should be proud of the Dream Team, since making war and playing basketball were what the United States does best. For this, and more, he was called an ugly American. Yet Barkley spent more time in the outdoor cafés along Las Ramblas, hobnobbing with the common folks, than all the other Dreamers put together.

He's been arrested and cleared on a gun charge, accidentally spit in a little girl's face, punched Bill Laimbeer (fine: $20,000—you would think they'd have given him a reward) and spent four hours in jail after an altercation with a heckler. He says he has a new plan for the next guy in a bar who calls him p"nigger." Provoke the bum into throwing the first punch so he can't be sued, then break the guy's face. But not with his shooting hand.

On the court, Barkley is equally unpredictable. Nobody can control him. He and 76ers teammate Rick Mahorn used to get ready to play by butting heads, but they did it without helmets. He'll post up 7'1" David Robinson and score in his face, spinning, faking, leaping and, probably, dunking—something he's done more over the last three years than any other NBA player. Or Barkley will run the break, dribble between his legs or pass behind his back. And he loves to stick the trey, too. Usually, he bricks it. Except in the last five minutes of a game.

"Can't nobody on the planet guard me," he likes to say. p"If I were seven feet tall, I'd be illegal in three states." Will anybody his size ever be so great a rebounder again? Barkley has an opinion: "Never be another. Ever. Ever."

A man who stands 6'4¾" tall, and whose muscular development is not radically different from dozens of other players, should not be able to play an inside power game for an undersized team and still be the only man in the NBA who is in the top five in both scoring and rebounding. Others come to play. Barkley comes to declare war. p"I beat on people. I intimidate people. I'll endure more pain than they will. That's a big part of my game," he says.

Of pesky guards who try to undercut him to draw a charge, the 252-pound Barkley says, p"None of them has ever tried to do it twice. I punish them. I drive my knee into their chest. I land on them. Luckily, I've never actually hurt anybody. But when they finally get up, they usually can't speak. Well, "actually, one little guard whispered, p'I won't do that again, Charles.'"

Barkley is a powder keg, as well as a 26-point, 13-rebound power forward. He's a truth-teller as well as a court jester. The roots of his humor, his anger, his ambition and his wisdom go back to the projects of Leeds, Alabama, where he was raised by his mother and grandmother. Growing up fatherless, he was the man of the family. He was always the one who picked up the family pieces, like when one of his younger brothers had a stroke after using cocaine. Barkley's mother was a maid, but he swore from early childhood that he'd p"be somebody special."

And he was. At Auburn, given access to a training table and the phone number of an all-night pizza parlor, he gained 100 pounds and led the Southeastern Conference in rebounding all three years. Nicknamed the Round Mound of Rebound and Boy Gorge, he came to the NBA in 1984 as a curiosity and a project. But he dropped 50 pounds and came under the tutelage of Julius Erving and Moses Malone, and he soon transformed himself into the Square Bear of Mid-Air. Since arriving in the NBA, he has been the league's second leading offensive rebounder, averaged 23.5 points and made seven All-Star teams.

However, as a folk hero and lightning rod for controversy, Barkley has exploded in the past year. On the Dream Team, he outshone everyone, including Jordan, showing the world that basketball could be ferocious as well as stratospheric and balletic. Back in the U.S., he discovered a second NBA life after a trade from the grouchy, moribund Philadelphia 76ers to the Suns. To get Barkley, the Suns gave what was widely considered a suicidal price—their 20 point All-Star shooting guard, their starting power forward and a 6'11" center who was one of the league's better shot blockers.

Would the Suns, who were 53-29 last season, become Charles and the four dwarfs? Hardly. At midseason the Suns had the NBA's best record. With Barkley at various times playing each of the three front-court positions in the Suns' four-guards-and-Charles pressure defense, Phoenix has become the talk of the sport and a possible postseason favorite.

To interview Barkley, PLAYBOY sent Tom Boswell, sportswriter and columnist for The Washington Post for 24 years, as well as an occasional profile writer for PLAYBOY. Boswell reports:

"Many superstar athletes like to hide or whine, especially those famous enough to take Godzilla to the rack. Barkley, however, hides nothing. He's turned in-your-face into a lifestyle. He says what he wants. He invents his own code of conduct. And he invites you to inspect his whole life.

"Subjects for the Playboy Interview are legendary for being reclusive or difficult or self-important. To Barkley, it's just another kind of fun. He picks you up when you get off the train and plays chauffeur. He gets you another drink and asks which football game you want to watch while you talk in his den. You ask for 90 minutes, he

gives you three hours until you run out of tapes. You ask for another hour in another city and he gives you the whole day, takes you everywhere, even lets you hear the women propositioning him on his hotel voice-mail. When he finds out you have the same golf handicap, he wants to set up a game so he can beat you.

"You interview him while he's in the whirlpool. You interview him while he interviews Shaquille O'Neal. You interview between gigantic bites of greasy food. You interview him while his drop-dead-beautiful wife walks around in short shorts and heels. When you leave something behind at his house and ask the first taxi driver you meet to help you find Charles Barkley's house, the guy says, 'Everybody knows where Charles lives.' And he takes you right to the door.

"Most of all, this is how Barkley dispenses his worldview. You go to his hotel room before a night game in Orlando. You ask him everything you can print and a couple things you figure he shouldn't have told you, so you won't print them because they're nobody's business. He turns on his beloved soap operas. You help him make the bed and arrange everything in the room so it's in perfect order. The guy's a freak for order and you know he won't do anything until that bed is made.

"A knock on the door. Three tailors—two men, one woman, all young and hip and dressed to die—enter. They've flown a thousand miles for a fitting. Today, it's pants. They brief him on the style they'd like for him. 'I'll take six pairs,' he says. The tailors stay and join the interview.

"Another knock on the door. A tall, attractive masseuse enters. Barkley starts to strip. The woman tailor leaves. The guys stay. This they have to see. She joins a *Playboy Interview* that is about as large as the McLaughlin Group. She hands out her card and says she wishes to be identified as a massage therapist because she doesn't do that other stuff. She's rubbed some NBA legs, she says, but none like Barkley's. m'Charles' thighs are as big as Stanley Roberts',' she says of the L.A. Clippers 7', 285-pound center. 'But Stanley's are like mush. Charles' legs are like rock.'

"The two tailors look at Barkley, look at the woman and exchange a glance that clearly says this man's life is one continuous possibility they can't even imagine.

"Slowly, Barkley puts on his game face. He wants to get mad at Shaquille O'Neal, but he can't. p'He's a nice kid. Polite, respectful, like I was when I came into the league. Not like Alonzo Mourning. I played him two nights ago. All he did was beat on me, kick my ass all night and motherfuck me to my face every time I tried to say something nice to him. He's got the worst attitude I ever saw in a rookie.'

"Barkley laughs wickedly. p'Alonzo's going to be great. I love his game.'

"In a few hours, Barkley must meet a different man in the paint. One who is eight inches taller, 50 pounds bigger and nine years younger than he. But Barkley expects to kick the Shaq's butt and lead his team to victory.

"You can look it up. He did."

Scene: Barkley's living room in an exclusive Philadelphia suburb. You enter his development through a security gate past an armed guard who sits in a stone turret. Barkley is in the final stages of preparation for his move to Phoenix. Boxes, many full and ready to ship, are everywhere. This disarray drives Barkley crazy. As he sits down for the interview, Barkley shouts to his wife, m"Did any of my friends call to bet on the game today?" It was just a head fake.

PLAYBOY: Things are in a moving-day shambles here. How does it feel to be starting over?

BARKLEY: Well, there is some sadness. I've been here eight years. This is all I know. Now I'm going into the unknown.

PLAYBOY: You weren't exactly happy here, especially the past few years. Is there anything that you'll miss?

BARKLEY: The worst is missing your friends. People in the Sixers organization, people in the restaurants, the fans who see every game. Otherwise, the negatives aren't that bad. The only negative is losing. I played here for eight years and we lost only two years. Other than that, the eight years have been great.

> "We live in a dangerous society. People are so sick in this world. I feel safer with my gun."

PLAYBOY: Philly fans are pretty tough.

BARKLEY: Actually, they've always been good to me. If you go out and try hard, they're going to like you. If you don't, they don't. I worked hard and that endeared me to them.

PLAYBOY: You must have some regrets.

BARKLEY: It's hard sometimes. Last year guys were saying they would have done better than me if they got the ball as much as I did. Guys were saying I was holding them back.

PLAYBOY: Are we finding out the truth about that now? Look at the Sixers' record

BARKLEY: Yeah, that frustrated me. Hersey Hawkins said I was holding him back. He was an All-Star with me. Armon Gilliam said he didn't get a chance to show his real game. I told him, g"You've been on three teams. I wasn't on the other two teams, and they traded you." Nobody ever had a problem with my game until last year, and I blame the Sixers for that. The Sixers should have just come out and said, "Listen, Charles is the only player we have with any trade value, that's why we'll trade him," instead of saying that Charles is causing all these problems.

PLAYBOY: Did the fans here give Moses Malone his due? Nobody worked harder than Moses.

BARKLEY: I don't think he was ever loved. Because they're not as nice to guys who are their own individuals. They want you to stay in your place. That's unfair. We all have opinions and we're all individuals. Just because you say something doesn't make it controversial, and it doesn't make you a bad person. We're not all supposed to think alike. But they want you to stay in your place before they give you their full love.

PLAYBOY: Can we talk about Harold Katz, the owner of the Sixers?

BARKLEY: Oh, Jesus.

PLAYBOY: What do you think of the guy?

BARKLEY: Well, he's just a great businessman. The biggest problem I have with him is that he treated everything as strictly business. There was no personal relationship with the players. If I were an owner I could see that. But as a player it wasn't right. Because we're not business. We're not property, we're not meat. We're people.

PLAYBOY: Katz' locker-room tirades were infamous. Was that destructive?

BARKLEY: Yeah. That's hard. You can't treat people like that. You can't shake somebody's hand if he wins and curse him out if he plays bad. That's too much of an emotional swing.

PLAYBOY: Do you rein yourself in for the press or the public?

BARKLEY: A lot of guys are different in private than they are in public. They say stuff to get reactions from the fans or the media. That's not my style. I don't have to lie, or say something and not really say anything. I don't think that's the way it should be done. You ask me a question, I'll tell you the truth. If you like my answer, that's great. If you don't, I'm still entitled to my opinion.

PLAYBOY: You have done things in moments of anger such as the time you spit at a fan who was heckling you and hit a little girl instead—that seemed crazy or mean.

BARKLEY: Other than the spitting incident—I did apologize for that—I don't apologize for anything I've said or done. I'm always blunt. I feel that white people are treated better than blacks. I think the rich are treated better than the poor. And I think men are treated better than women. The press gets on my case a lot because I say stuff like that. But other than the spitting incident, I don't really think I've done anything wrong.

PLAYBOY: You've been a champion of fat people, too.

BARKLEY: That's true. People don't want to hear the truth. Fat people are discriminated against. That's just human nature. Stereotypes abound. Like all black people are hoodlums, all Jewish people are crooks. That's totally not true. What's even worse, it's considered all right that people think that way. Marge Schott can say g"money-grubbing Jews" or "million-dollar niggers," because that's the society we live in. People say it's freedom of speech. That's not freedom of speech. Any woman who has that much power isn't going to hire blacks or Jews. That ain't the worst part about it. The worst thing is that she may go and kiss up to them. When the Reds won the World Series, she was drinking champagne with the brothers and calling them million-dollar niggers behind their backs. I have more respect for the Klan, because when they call you nigger they don't sit there and drink with you.

PLAYBOY: In Leeds, Alabama, where you grew up, were people judged on their merits?

BARKLEY: No, you were judged on your race in Leeds. I have to give credit to my mother and grandmother and my best friend in the world, Joseph Mock. Those three people always kept my head level as far as race was concerned. My mother and grandmother said, g"Listen, all white people are not bad." They kept stressing that. A lot of white people helped us make it, because my mother and grandmother were maids.

PLAYBOY: But most people aren't as open-minded as your mother and grandmother.

BARKLEY: I blame the media for a lot of our problems. They don't usually tell the truth. They got the majority of white people thinking black people are bad, and they got the majority of black people thinking white people are bad. I don't believe that. The truth is, we're all the same. But the negative stuff sells papers and TV shows. Instead of always doing stories about who gets mugged and killed by somebody of the opposite race or saying that all black people are on welfare or all white people are in the Klan, they can be a little more realistic in their reporting.

PLAYBOY: You grew up in the Deep South, in the projects, but you went to a school that was mostly white. What was that like?

BARKLEY: It was good for me. It gave me a chance to experience more. The educational system was better at the white school. It gave me a chance to interact with nice white people. When you're a kid, you don't think racist. When you grow up, that's when you become racist. Some knucklehead teaches you to be racist. You can't look at all white people and say, g"I don't like them." You can't say, "Well, I like all blacks." There are black people I don't want to be around, and there are white people I don't want to be around.

PLAYBOY: Do you think people cry racism when they can't get the job done on their own?

BARKLEY: A lot of people use racism as a crutch. I'd be the first to admit that a lot of black people use that for their failures. No white person in this world can stop me from being successful if I want to be successful. I believe that. No black person could stop me from being successful, either. I don't think it's fair to blame all black America's problems on white America. Because we do a lot of stuff to ourselves. I saw a very disturbing statistic. More than seventy percent of crimes against black people are committed by other black people.

> "I don't enjoy all the attention. I don't really enjoy being 'Charles Barkley.'"

PLAYBOY: Is there any way around that frustration?

BARKLEY: It doesn't help to get mad at the world. I'm not ever going to be jealous of somebody else's success. If a black person wants to open up a business, he can. I don't think it's fair to get mad at people from another culture for being successful in your culture. We have that same opportunity. If we were going to put in something, we should have put it there before.

PLAYBOY: And how do you handle racial slurs?

BARKLEY: I can't take them.

PLAYBOY: Does that make you a target for anybody who is obnoxious enough?

BARKLEY: No, that's just going to make my right hand sore from hitting people. I don't mind. I just have to get better at provoking them. I've got to make them hit me first, so they can't sue me. They don't pay me enough money to let people call me any name in the book.

PLAYBOY: When I was reading up on you, the thing that worried

me was that you have a gun in your car. Are you the kind of person who should carry a gun?

BARKLEY: Let me ask you a question. I've had my gun in my car for, let's see, nine years. You've heard about it only once. If I was a maniac or a crazy person, don't you think you would have heard about it more than once?

PLAYBOY: It's argued that your chances of getting killed with your own gun are much greater than your chances of getting killed with anybody else's gun.

BARKLEY: We live in a dangerous society. People are so sick in this world. With the car jacking going on, I feel safer with my gun. People know I'm Charles Barkley and I'm going to have money on me. I'm not the statistic. What about the statistics that say some small kid from Alabama isn't going to make it to the NBA? You can't compare yourself to a statistic. You have to be better than a statistic.

PLAYBOY: The stats say you're more likely to be killed with your own gun by accident, or in a domestic argument or by your kid, who doesn't know what he's playing with, than by an intruder. People get depressed and kill themselves.

BARKLEY: I won't kill myself. I'm one of my favorite people.

PLAYBOY: When people draw you into fights with racial slurs, are they doing it so they can sue you?

BARKLEY: No, people use those words because they're racist. That's what they've been taught. We're taught racism in this country. I have to stand up for myself. I didn't get where I am now by backing down and letting things stop me.

PLAYBOY: On occasion, you've been accused of being racist. Remember the Dave Hoppen incident last season?

BARKLEY: The Sixers were down to fourteen or fifteen players in training camp and somebody asked me, g"Do you think they'll cut Dave Hoppen?" I said, "I don't know. But if they cut Dave Hoppen, some people will be upset because we'll have an all-black team." End of quotation. Well, in no way did I say Dave Hoppen was on the team only because he was white. Or a token. I was really offended by the way the media made me out to be a racist. Because, as a black person, I am never going to be a racist. I know how it feels to be treated that way. I will never treat another person that way. Never.

PLAYBOY: You hold your opinions strongly. Do you fall into the trap of thinking that everything you believe is absolute truth?

BARKLEY: Well, as far as racism and sexism go, I'm flat-out right. There's no in-between. I'm not fooling myself that I'm the smartest person in the world. But on those two things I am a hundred percent positive that I am right. I think the majority of people in the world will agree with me. My opinions are just as important as everybody else's.

PLAYBOY: People are fascinated by public figures who say what they think.

BARKLEY: It is more important to talk about things like that than it is to play basketball. That stuff is a lot more significant than going out and getting twenty points.

PLAYBOY: There are some quotes that live on. After Bobby Knight left you off the 1984 Olympic team, you said, g"I hate the son of a bitch." Do you still feel that way?

BARKLEY: No, not at all. I love Bobby Knight. I like the way he coaches. But, honestly, has he done things wrong? Yes. Have I done things wrong? Yes. But, on the whole, the guy is a great basketball coach. I didn't deserve to make that Olympic team. I didn't want to and didn't care about it.

PLAYBOY: Does it bother you that that's one quote you're remembered for?

BARKLEY: You know, with most of the stuff I've said, I was just trying to have fun. Everybody laughs, and then they put it in the paper and it doesn't sound funny. That's one thing that makes me mad about the media. The reporters know you're joking, and then they print it. The night I said, g"That's the kind of game that makes you want to go home and beat your wife and kids," everybody started laughing. When I read it in the paper the next day, I could see why people were offended by it. I don't think of myself as giving interviews. I just have conversations. That gets me in trouble.

PLAYBOY: At the Olympics you said a couple of things I wondered if you wanted to take back, such as America's being best at basketball and the military.

BARKLEY: No, I'm right about the military. We should have the best military. We should have the best of everything. I'm for America. I don't like foreigners thinking they're better than we are. That's what we talked about in our team meetings. We wanted to prove we were the best basketball players in the world, and we did.

PLAYBOY: You also said that Herlander Coimbra, the player from Angola you elbowed during the Olympics, probably hadn't eaten in a few weeks.

BARKLEY: I was just having fun.

Scene: The months pass, and Barkley is stomping through the league with his Phoenix Suns, who, as we went to press, sport the best record in the NBA. This just might be Barkley's MVP season. He is sitting in a whirlpool in the Orlando Magic locker room, having just interviewed Shaquille O'Neal for Barkley's Phoenix TV show. Of Shaq, he says, "He's not as tall as I thought. But he's so wide. That's better than tall. He's as thick as me. Imagine me, but seven feet tall." Being in a locker room with Barkley is like being in a Vegas casino with Don Rickles. He is the self-appointed master of ceremonies in his world. He tries to trade four of his teammates to the Magic GM for Shaq. He exchanges scouting reports (anywhere else, this would be called gossip) with Magic coach Matt Guokas. He listens to Guokas' son tell about his college career and the Magic's Terry Catledge explain his latest injury. Barkley is interested in everybody else's life story and doesn't hog the floor with his own business. Everyone who comes into the room and discovers Barkley lights up as if it's Christmas morning and they just discovered Santa Claus in their living room, still eating his milk and cookies. Nobody leaves quickly. Typically, Barkley finds it natural to give an interview while taking a whirlpool and holding court with anyone who passes by.

PLAYBOY: A few years ago you said, "As long as Bird is around I will only be the second-worst defensive player in basketball."

BARKLEY: Larry's one of the greatest players ever to play the game, and that was just some joking around. But yeah, that's probably the most disappointing part of my game.

PLAYBOY: Do you pick your moments to turn up the defensive intensity?

BARKLEY: I can play defense with anybody in the last five minutes of the game.

PLAYBOY: You crash the boards, and that's a big part of defense.

BARKLEY: Yeah. The most important stat to me is rebounding. If you shoot the ball enough, you can average twenty points a game. I'd rather get twenty rebounds than score twenty points.

PLAYBOY: Conventional wisdom says you have to box out to get rebounds. Do you agree?
BARKLEY: No, I don't. It's hard to box out guys if they are good rebounders. If you're going to stand there and hold them, you're not going toward the ball. Somebody will beat you to it.
PLAYBOY: How many guys can get away with that?
BARKLEY: Not many, but there aren't many good rebounders. No, excuse me, there aren't many great rebounders.
PLAYBOY: Who are the great rebounders?
BARKLEY: Dennis Rodman, Charles Oakley, Hakeem Olajuwon. Those are the guys I respect the most.
PLAYBOY: Do they mostly block out or do they go for the ball?
BARKLEY: Dennis is the best at just going to the ball. Charles Oakley gets more out of less jumping ability than any player out there, but he doesn't jump. He boxes out. Hakeem gets them on talent and quickness.
PLAYBOY: You'll probably be remembered longest as a relatively short guy who is the second-best offensive rebounder in the game. How can you be that much better than people who are that much bigger?
BARKLEY: Number one, God gave me a lot of talent. Number two, I just want to rebound. It's all desire.
PLAYBOY: What's the best part of your game?
BARKLEY: My competitiveness.
PLAYBOY: Let's talk about dunks. Over a three-year period, you had more than five hundred dunks. More than Michael Jordan. More than anybody. Why are you the league's leading dunker?
BARKLEY: Because I'm so short. I don't like laying it up because it can get blocked. Get it in the rim. I dunk because it's the easiest shot.
PLAYBOY: Robert Parish once said that being hit by you was like being crunched in a trash compactor.
BARKLEY: I did bang him. My philosophy is simple. I want to bang, bang, bang for forty-eight minutes. I want to bang you and try to outplay you the last three minutes of the game. I'm betting that you're going to wear down. If I start banging you in the first quarter, I think you're going to get tired before me.
PLAYBOY: When you talk about banging, what's the most important part of your body? Hips, elbows or legs?
BARKLEY: Leg strength is so important when you're trying to get position. Using your ass is important. I have really big thighs. My legs are huge. That's why I can't buy pants. I used to wear size thirty-six pants, but because my thighs are so big, I have to get forty-twos and have the waist taken in to make up for the difference. All my strength comes from my lower body.
PLAYBOY: You once said that the game is slower for you in the final minutes. Wayne Gretzky, Larry Bird and other athletes say the same thing.
BARKLEY: Jerry West said that if you're a great player, the game's in slow motion. If you can play the game, it is easy. I really believe it. For me, this is probably the first year in my life that I've really had to work and do all the other things to he good.
PLAYBOY: You mean weight lifting?
BARKLEY: Weight lifting, running. I used to take running for granted. Now I can feel myself running. It's a struggle for me to run. I'm forcing myself to run hard. I guess I'm starting to get old. I used to go to the gym and play. Now I have to get there a little bit early, do a lot of stretching and things like that.
PLAYBOY: Who is the best player you've ever played against?
BARKLEY: Kevin McHale, bar none. You had to hope he was missing. You couldn't stop him. In his prime he was the best. He was too big for me and everybody on him, whether it was Moses or Bobby Jones. That Celtics front line was the greatest front line ever to play the game. There were no weaknesses.
PLAYBOY: Do you like to be the center of attention?
BARKLEY: I don't enjoy all the attention. I don't really enjoy being g"Charles Barkley." I just try to have fun in whatever I do. If it were up to me, I would just play basketball and walk around anonymously. But I want to have fun. I don't try to get attention by doing things or saying things. I just try to be honest and make sure I enjoy this. These are the quality years of my life. I've spent all my adulthood being a star. If I'm miserable and don't enjoy it, that's wrong. I'm not going to spend twenty to thirty years in this position, so I'm going to enjoy the hell out of it while I'm here.

"No white person in this world can stop me from being successful if I want to be successful."

PLAYBOY: Does that extend to the basketball court during games?
BARKLEY: That makes the game easier for me, because I'm always relaxed. Talking to the fans and cheerleaders relieves the tension.
PLAYBOY: Lee Trevino said the same thing about playing golf. He said if he couldn't talk he couldn't play.
BARKLEY: I would be so uptight. I wouldn't have anything to do but think about a pressing situation.
PLAYBOY: You have a reputation as one of the premiere trash talkers in the league.
BARKLEY: That stuff is overrated. I just have fun. When the guys start talking trash, I'm just talking. I don't look at it as talking trash.
PLAYBOY: Does it ever hurt your game?
BARKLEY: Sometimes talking trash makes you play better. You want to back up the trash you're talking. You think, I've said it. Now I have to do it.
PLAYBOY: If you were talking trash to Larry Bird or Chuck Person, what would you say? Most people think it would be, I'm going to kill you because I hate you. But it's lighter than that, isn't it?
BARKLEY: All they say is that you can't stop them. Sometimes you tell guys what you're going to do, then you do it.
PLAYBOY: Does anybody take it too personally?
BARKLEY: When you play against a guy who can't handle it, he gets all personal.
PLAYBOY: There's a classic piece of trash talking between you and Chuck Person. You told your teammates to isolate you on him. You said, g"Let me torture him."

BARKLEY: Chuck talks more than any other player in the NBA. If you don't play well against him, he lets you know it.
PLAYBOY: When you're torturing somebody, how do you feel?
BARKLEY: When I get twenty points in a half, sometimes I feel bad. I like playing against good players because it's a challenge to me. I don't like playing against bad players who you can kill all night.
PLAYBOY: Did it hurt you when they called you Food World in college?
BARKLEY: It didn't make me feel bad, like it does fat people. I understood that they were trying to get Auburn's basketball program on the map and they wanted to use me to attract attention. The only thing that annoyed me was that they weren't giving me enough credit as a basketball player. I was leading the SEC in rebounding.
PLAYBOY: What about when they sent pizzas to the bench?
BARKLEY: You know what? I don't get upset about stuff like that. I have a great sense of humor.
PLAYBOY: Even when they called you the Crisco Kid?
BARKLEY: I don't worry about what they call me. I worry about playing ball well. I may be whatever they call me, but I am one of only two guys who led the SEC in rebounding three years in a row. The other guy played before they had sneakers. [While at LSU, Shaquille O'Neal became the third player to reach this record. Ed]
PLAYBOY: Did you feel like a fat kid when you were growing up?
BARKLEY: No, because I didn't get fat until I went to college.
PLAYBOY: How did it happen?
BARKLEY: They served dinner too early. We practiced from three to six. They served dinner from six to seven, but I had been running down the court for three hours You don't feel like eating right away. The guys on the team usually slept through dinner, or we were just too tired to rush back to eat. So we ordered pizza. My freshman year, I would say out of two hundred days, I probably ordered pizza late at night one hundred sixty times. That won't do you any good.

"Using your ass is important. I have really big thighs. That's why I can't buy pants."

Scene: Barkley sits in a hotel lobby, waiting for his old friend Buzzy Braman—former shooting coach for the 76ers who now holds that position with the Magic—to go to lunch with us. On the short walk from the Magic's arena to the Suns' hotel, Barkley has signed 50 autographs. Every attractive woman does or says something that, if the roles were reversed, would constitute sexual harassment. Barkley is polite but never reacts. When he gets his messages, one is from a woman who has found a way to proposition him on his hotel voice-mail. Braman arrives in a tiny, old, beat-up car that looks like it escaped from a Sixties college campus. Barkley offers to sit in the cramped backseat. When he gets in the front instead, he pulls the seat all the way forward and says, "Got enough room back there?" His knees are close to his chin. Braman takes Barkley to his health club to show him off to his friends. Barkley's "lunch" is 90 minutes of constant interruption, requests for photos and congratulations. At this greasy spoon joint, he has an enormous deli-style sandwich with fried egg sticking out every side. He praises the food. He smiles for every group photo, even for one woman who can't figure out her own camera. Braman is in heaven. Barkley enjoys Braman's obvious pleasure.

PLAYBOY: You were saying, while we were walking over here, that you didn't have much freedom in public. Make that no freedom in public.
BARKLEY: That's probably the hardest part of it: not being able to do things like a regular person. I am a normal person, except when I'm playing ball.
PLAYBOY: Do you turn down your metabolism in public?
BARKLEY: Yeah, I can't respond to people all the time. You have to keep your distance. Everybody wants a piece of you.
PLAYBOY: All sorts of people ask you for your autograph. I would think you'd see a lot of lost souls. Does it depress you?
BARKLEY: The only thing that depresses me is that most of the people are selling autographs now. It's not the good old days when they just asked for them if they respected your ability. Now they do it as a business venture.
PLAYBOY: You criticized Harold Katz on that front as well. Is the Phoenix front office different?
BARKLEY: I have never even seen the Suns' owner, Jerry Colangelo, in the locker room.
PLAYBOY: Does that cause less tension?
BARKLEY: Yes. If the organization really likes the players, they will play harder for that organization. They will come back from injuries sooner and try a little harder.
PLAYBOY: How good is the Suns team you're with now?
BARKLEY: We're not the best team in the league, but we're one of them. If we play well we can beat anybody.
PLAYBOY: Can you see down the road, within a year or two, when you might be able to say the Suns are the best team?
BARKLEY: I don't know if we will ever have the best team. We have some weaknesses. We have a small team.
PLAYBOY: There was a story at the beginning of training camp about your putting a big hit on Kevin Johnson. Do you test your teammates?
BARKLEY: I always test my teammates. You don't want to go eighty-two games without knowing what to expect from them when it gets to crunch time.

PLAYBOY: People have often said you're critical of teammates. There was the time you motioned to coach Jimmy Lynam to take Mike Gminski out of the game when he wasn't playing well.
BARKLEY: Mike Gminski and I played together for three seasons. He was having a bad game one day and I got frustrated and I told the coach to take him out. We were together for two and a half years and that's the only thing that people can remember.
PLAYBOY: Today, the first person you asked about was Gminski.
BARKLEY: Everybody will always try to make a big deal out of that. Let me tell you something. Danny Ainge screamed at me the other night on the court. That's one thing about our team. We don't get upset when somebody says something. But that's hard to explain to the public. Players are so fucking spoiled now. When I first went to Philadelphia, we screamed at one another and that made us play better. Dennis Johnson said when he was on the Celtics they yelled and that made them play better. We do the same thing in Phoenix, but we don't take it personally. We don't whine to the media. We don't whine to the coach. That's the difference between a good team and a bad team.
PLAYBOY: Why is there less whining with the Suns?
BARKLEY: Because the players are not insecure. They probably think, Charles is that good and he's going to get a lot of publicity. We're not jealous of him and that's just the way it is. When I went to Philadelphia, I was not jealous of Doc and Moses. Look at Chicago. I don't think those guys are jealous of Michael and Scottie. They just want to win. You have to sacrifice a little bit of yourself.
PLAYBOY: You continue to have problems with referees and fines—more than $140,000 in fines in the past few years.
BARKLEY: I'm just giving my money to charity.
PLAYBOY: Are the referees in the NBA that bad?
BARKLEY: No, not in general. But some of them get intimidated on the road.
PLAYBOY: So you intimidate them back?
BARKLEY: [*Laughs.*]
PLAYBOY: You and Mike Mathis don't get along. He threw you out of a game a few years ago.
BARKLEY: I hate him and he hates me. It's definitely personal between us.
PLAYBOY: Can you guys work out the problem?
BARKLEY: Never, never, ever.
PLAYBOY: Have you asked the league to take him off your games?
BARKLEY: I don't want to think about it.
PLAYBOY: What if you saw him working the seventh game of the NBA finals?
BARKLEY: I don't want to see him there.
PLAYBOY: Do you have the qualities to lead a team to the championship?
BARKLEY: You have to have the talent. No matter how good Michael Jordan is, he needed Pippen. They couldn't win because they didn't have enough players. I just met Dave Winfield. Think about all he's accomplished. He said he was finally on a team that was good enough to win. That's what it comes down to. I'd be a fool to walk up to Dan Marino and say, g"Hey, you haven't won a Super Bowl, you're a loser." You should never let a sporting event dictate your self-worth. If this team plays well, we could win it. If we don't, there were teams that were better than us.
PLAYBOY: Do you think there are players in the NBA who raise their teammates' level of play? Like Magic and Bird?
BARKLEY: I always think about that. That stuff is kind of overrated. Look at the players they're playing with. Kevin McHale is going to be a hell of a player regardless. Robert Parish was going to be a hell of a player regardless. Dennis Johnson was a hell of a player. Danny Ainge has always been a hell of a player. James Worthy—hell of a basketball player. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Scott. Cooper. I had Charles Shackleford. You can't compare Charles Shackleford with Robert Parish or Kareem. You can't compare Armon Gilliam with James Worthy. That's a little unfair.
PLAYBOY: Bird and Magic raised their teammates with their great passing. Do you raise your teammates with your emotional level?
BARKLEY: Coach Westphal thinks I inspire the team by my attitude. My attitude is simple. I go out there and play as hard as I can for forty minutes. My emotion has helped me most of the time. Magic Johnson has a word he always uses: manpower. He says it all comes back to manpower. If you have enough manpower and things go your way, you're going to win it.
PLAYBOY: How do the fans in Phoenix take to your flamboyant style of play?
BARKLEY: I don't worry about who likes or dislikes me. I know what it takes for me to be successful. I've been successful for eleven years.
PLAYBOY: Do people like you in Phoenix?
BARKLEY: They have been unbelievable to me But I was never treated badly by the fans in Philly. Never.
PLAYBOY: Arizona gets something of a rap on racial issues.
BARKLEY: The city of Phoenix had the Martin Luther King holiday before the state. That's all I can say on that.
PLAYBOY: I saw you partying along Las Ramblas when you were at the Olympics. Do you hate to sit around?
BARKLEY: I love sitting around, but I was at the Olympics. I'm not going to spend two of the greatest weeks of my life sitting in my damn room like a moron. That was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Because there was never anything like the Dream Team. There never will be again.
PLAYBOY: A lot of people don't understand that. Even though you knew you were going to kill everybody, it was still special.
BARKLEY: It was really special. Let me tell you something, I'm getting sick of hearing how bad the other teams were. It wasn't that the other teams were bad. It was that our team was just so awesome. It's kind of like having a Rolls-Royce every day of your life and never having to drive a Chevette.
PLAYBOY: Do you feel lucky that you came along at the right time to be at your peak on that team, before Bird and Magic disappeared, and while some young guys like David Robinson were starting to blossom? That might be the all-time team.

"Anybody who has sex without using a condom is out of his mind."

BARKLEY: It was the all-time team in any sport, ever. Magic played well. Larry didn't play as well as he was capable of because of his back. But you still had Michael and Scottie. You just can't put together a team that good in any sport. I was honored to be selected.
PLAYBOY: Can you talk about the teamwork or chemistry?
BARKLEY: There's no such thing as that. See, it's simple. If you can play, you can play. Good players just want to win and that's all we were concerned with. Bad, insecure players cause teams problems. Bad players worry about how much they score, because they're not getting minutes. But on that team, because all of us were so good, we just let it happen.
PLAYBOY: They divided up the minutes pretty evenly so nobody really had to worry about that.
BARKLEY: If we had lost, guys would have been bitching. If you're a good player and you're on that team, you're only concerned about winning.
PLAYBOY: How did you feel about the controversy surrounding Magic Johnson's second retirement?
BARKLEY: I feel bad about all the pressure Magic has been under. I think he should be playing.
PLAYBOY: What did you think about the people who were afraid they might have caught AIDS by playing against him?
BARKLEY: They're entitled to that opinion. It's not fair for us to tell them they're wrong. The medical opinion says there's a small chance. Well, who are we to tell those guys they should take that small chance? Everybody said there's a remote chance you can get bitten by a snake if you walk through the desert. Well, you don't have to walk through the desert.
PLAYBOY: Have guys around the league changed their sex lives because of AIDS?
BARKLEY: Yeah. If the situation with Magic Johnson didn't make you change, there's something wrong with you.
PLAYBOY: You don't think guys are backsliding now?
BARKLEY: No. Magic has helped so many people understand sexual activity. Anybody who has sex without using a condom is out of his mind.
PLAYBOY: If you were infected with HIV, would you go public after seeing what happened to Magic and Arthur Ashe?
Barkley: We're so ignorant in our society. We treat people with AIDS terribly. I would probably retire and spend every day with my daughter.
PLAYBOY: Has being a parent changed you in any way? Have you found out anything about yourself since Christiana was born?
BARKLEY: It lets you know that there's nothing more important than your kids.
PLAYBOY: Are you good at the obnoxious parts of being a parent the diaper changes, the midnight feedings?
BARKLEY: No. I'd rather go out and run five miles and make more money and hire a nanny. Every time I think about changing a diaper, I run a little bit harder and a little bit faster to make sure I can afford a nanny until Christiana's old enough to take care of that herself.
PLAYBOY: Are you a good playing daddy? Do you like to play the board games and blocks and stuff like that?
BARKLEY: Not yet. I'm looking forward to retiring. Right now, my whole life is based on making things better for my family, so I'm not good about being a father. I'm trying to make money and set myself up for the future. We can have fun like a regular family once I'm retired. That's why women are important. They are better parents than men are because they are willing to do those obnoxious little things. They get up in the night.
PLAYBOY: What's the best part about being a dad?
BARKLEY: When she's kissing me every five minutes and telling me she loves me, or when we go shopping and she's just happy. When my daughter is playing with her toys, and then running back to show me, that's what makes me feel like everything I've done is worth it. If I die tomorrow, my daughter wouldn't have to marry some bum who beats her just because they have kids and don't have any money. My daughter won't ever be in that situation. It makes me think all the bad experiences were worth it.
PLAYBOY: Okay, here's a news flash: Charles Barkley appointed commissioner of the NBA. What would you do?
BARKLEY: I would drug-test everybody. I would put somebody in charge of helping the inner city because we don't do enough for the inner city. I would be a little more stringent with the fans because some of them just go to games to harass, and that's not right. When they use profanity toward you or your family, they cross the line. The NBA doesn't really have any balls. It's concerned only about money. It's like, well, the fans pay their money, so they can say and do what they want. That's not right
PLAYBOY: Both Isiah Thomas and Michael Jordan have been involved in gambling controversies. You had a flap about making a bet with Mark Jackson.
BARKLEY: Michael Jordan was treated unfairly. What Michael Jordan does with his money is his business. I think the NBA was totally wrong. He can do whatever he wants to do with his money. If he wants to play golf with it, that's fine. And if he's going to keep playing golf like he was playing that weekend, I want to play him, too.
PLAYBOY: How about the people he was playing with?
BARKLEY: In fairness to Michael, he did not know that guy. When he goes home for the summer, he's not going to assume his friends will be hanging out with drug dealers and put him in that situation. I blame his friends more than I blame him. Obviously, Michael Jordan ain't going to play with no cocaine dealer. But if I go to Leeds during the summer, I don't expect my friends to have a drug dealer as one of the guys in our foursome.
PLAYBOY: Portland's Clyde Drexler once said, "Whatever Charles wants, Charles gets." Is it too easy for you now?
BARKLEY: Nobody gives me anything. Everything I get I earn. I don't want that much from other people. There ain't nothing easy and there ain't nothing free. That's the only rule I know.
PLAYBOY: Is that a lesson for black kids?
BARKLEY: As a black person growing up in this country you have to realize that's a strike against you. So you're going to have to work a little harder. And if you want an excuse, you've got an excuse. The white man can't stop me from being successful if I want it bad enough. That's a phrase you hear tossed around by blacks sometimes.
PLAYBOY: That whites can stop you?
BARKLEY: Yeah. The white man won't let me be successful. I say that's bull. Nobody could stop me from being successful, and that's the way you have to approach life.
PLAYBOY: You don't think that your physical talent is a big part of your success? What if you had less talent?
BARKLEY: There are a lot of players who have talent who never make it.
PLAYBOY: But you feel that you could have made it, even without your athletic talent?
BARKLEY: I would have made it at something. I'm too determined. I made up my mind a long time ago I was going to be successful at something.
PLAYBOY: You were not a particularly good athlete growing up,

even after you said you were going to be in the NBA. You didn't make the high school team the first time you tried out.

BARKLEY: I was just joking around then. I was using basketball to go to college for free. That's the only reason I started playing ball. I never expected to be where I am today. But there was no doubt in my mind I was going to be a success.

PLAYBOY: You said from an early age that you were going to do something special.

BARKLEY: I don't want to be like everybody else.

PLAYBOY: Most people do.

BARKLEY: I know. I don't. Seriously. Nobody wants to shoot in the last two or three minutes of a game. I do. Somebody has to be the hero. It might as well be me.

PLAYBOY: Is it possible that the two special gifts you were given were basketball and the ability to make people around you have a good time?

BARKLEY: Yeah, I believe that.

PLAYBOY: And that the second one sometimes gets misinterpreted and people think, Well, he's a show-off or he wants attention?

BARKLEY: Yeah. There's no doubt in my mind. Because I am Charles Barkley, I'm going to get the attention. I just want people around me to enjoy what I'm experiencing. I've lived a dream. I've done more in my life than people who will live to be a hundred are going to do. I'm thirty years old and I've been all over the world, played with Dr. J, played against Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, got to meet all kinds of people. I got a chance to give people money who didn't have money, to make them smile, to visit kids in the hospital. Hey, I've had an incredible life. If it ended tomorrow, I'd still be, like, wow.

PLAYBOY: Are you ever impressed with what you've accomplished?

BARKLEY: I think it's kind of amazing. My wife said to me the other day, g"Are you ever in awe of yourself?" And that made me think. Life goes by so fast that you don't have time to be in awe of yourself. I know I can go out there and score a hundred points. But tomorrow night some guy could lock me up and kick my ass and it would be like I ain't done nothing. You're only remembered for your last game. That's the sad thing about it.

PLAYBOY: Ten years from now, will you miss all the action?

BARKLEY: No. I can accept getting old. There are people who say I'm not going to want to retire in three years. I don't believe that. You have to be a man about everything that happens in your life. When I make a mistake, I don't lie, bitch or complain. I take the heat and move on. You won't see me out there struggling to play. They won't have to tear my uniform off me. You won't see me going overseas to play. I think you just have to say, g"Hey, I had a great career and I can't do it anymore."

PLAYBOY: Your threshold of pain is a legend. Is that willpower, or do you think you actually feel pain less?

BARKLEY: A combination of both. Athletes have to play in pain. If you sit out every time you're in pain, you can't play professional sports.

PLAYBOY: Are you worried that your injuries will stick with you the rest of your life?

BARKLEY: I realize that when I'm in my late forties and fifties I won't be able to walk. But I won't have to work until I'm sixty-five, like most people do. To me it's worth it. I see my grandmother's new house or visit my mother in her new house and ride in her new Lexus. When I signed my first contract, I bought my mother an Oldsmobile. For Christmas three or four years later, I bought her a Mercedes. Every time I think about how bad some part of my body hurts, I think about that. You can't describe what that is like.

PLAYBOY: We'll have to come back in twenty years and ask you about the pain.

BARKLEY: You know what? There's no greater pain to me than being poor. I've been poor and now I have money. That's pain: being poor and struggling all the time to make ends meet. Seeing something that you want and can't have, to me that's serious pain.

PLAYBOY: When your basketball career is over, how do you think you will be remembered?

BARKLEY: People will say, g"When I paid my fifty bucks to see Charles Barkley play, he played as hard as he could." That's the only thing I expect. When I lace up them Nikes, I play as hard as I can no matter what is happening around me. I don't dog it. I play.

Sir Charles telephones from Los Angeles, where two days before he has attended his first Super Bowl. He declares the spectacle m"awesome" and the game itself "awful." He skipped all the fancy parties—like Magic's bash at the Palace. Barkley says, "I just came for the game. Sat with Jeffrey Osbourne. Had a ball."

PLAYBOY: When we first talked before the season, you said that the Suns were not the best team in the NBA, but you thought that you would have a fighting chance to beat anybody in the playoffs. It's past midseason and the Suns have the best record in the league. What do you think about your chances now?

BARKLEY: Things have worked out better than anybody could have imagined. It's been incredible how well we've come along. I thought our lack of height and defense would hurt us. But we've played taller and bigger than I thought we would, and we've played great defense when it has really mattered. We're a finesse team. But so far, the punchers haven't been able to catch up with the boxers.

PLAYBOY: Have your new teammates surprised you?

BARKLEY: Before I got here, everybody told me this team was soft. Not true. I knew that Danny Ainge, Dan Majerle and Kevin Johnson were outstanding players, but I didn't know just how good they really were. Majerle is just as tough as I am. There are not many players in the league that tough. But he is. Ainge wants to win just as bad as I do. Same goes for KJ. When he doesn't play well or somebody else doesn't play well, Kevin gets really ticked off. He gets on himself. He gets on them. I like that. Tom Chambers has been an inspiration to me the way he's handled a tough situation. Here's a guy who has scored more points in the NBA than I have and he's accepted playing less minutes for the good of the team. I really respect him. He's made me think that, when the time comes for me, maybe I could handle it, too.

PLAYBOY: What about Richard Dumas? He's the talk of the league this season—a rookie coming off a drug problem who's the second-highest scorer on the winningest team.

BARKLEY: He's a nice, quiet kid. He reminds me of a small-town guy. I don't think he understands the magnitude of his ability. He has spectacular talent, and right now he's playing on talent. He can get by with that. But once he learns the fine points of the game, he'll get to the next level.

PLAYBOY: What's the general attitude on the Suns, compared to your last couple years in Philadelphia?

BARKLEY: We're a veteran team. We know what it takes to win. And we really want it. It's been a long time since I could go to a game and not have to worry about being spectacular every night. In Philadelphia people expected me to play defense. They expected me to score every basket. They expected me to get every rebound. That's impossible. Here it's so nice. Everybody on this team scratches everybody else's back. Like they say, life is good.

IN THE FIGHT
EIF
STAND
AHC
CENTENNIAL

Model **@LUCYYROSE.X**

Photography by **MIKE COHEN | @MIKECOHENPHOTOS**
PR **LSA PUBLICATIONS | @LEO.ALDERMAN @LSAMODELS**

Describe yourself in three words.
Fun, ambitious & reliable.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Yes! This has been my dream since even before I started modelling.

What was it like starting out as a model?
Omg I was so so nervous to begin with, I remember going on my first test shoot for an agency and didn't know if they wanted me to smile or be all moody and fashion model vibes which lend me to standing there all awkward like as if I was on a police line haha but after a while I got the hang of it, there's so many supportive people in the industry that helped me come out of my shell.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
Learning to love and accept how I look without letting the beauty standards of social media tell me I need to change how I look and fall into the hole of cosmetic surgery.

Describe your perfect day off when you are not modelling?
My perfect day off is a morning gym session which is either followed by spending the day In lounge wear, watching good telly with loved ones with good food and drinks or going out for the day/evening and spending time with friends and family. I just love spending quality time with loved ones.

Do you feel more like a city person or a country person?
I would say it used to be country but still temporarily moving there recently I notice how much of a nightmare it was just to go to your closest shop just to get your essentials so now it's defo the city haha. I love mad cities, London, New York and Vegas are my favourites.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
Probably Vegas I love the lights and the atmosphere.

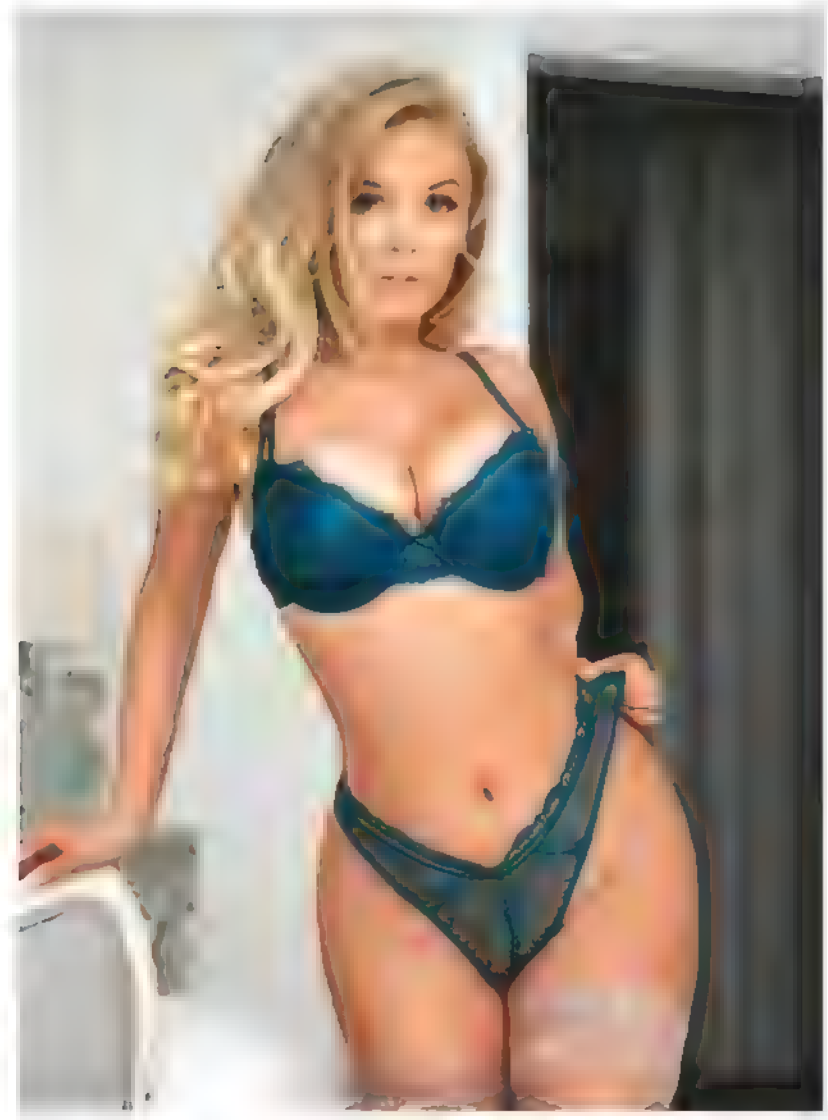
Do you have a secret talent?
I'm actually very arty and do most of my friends make up before their shoots or big events.

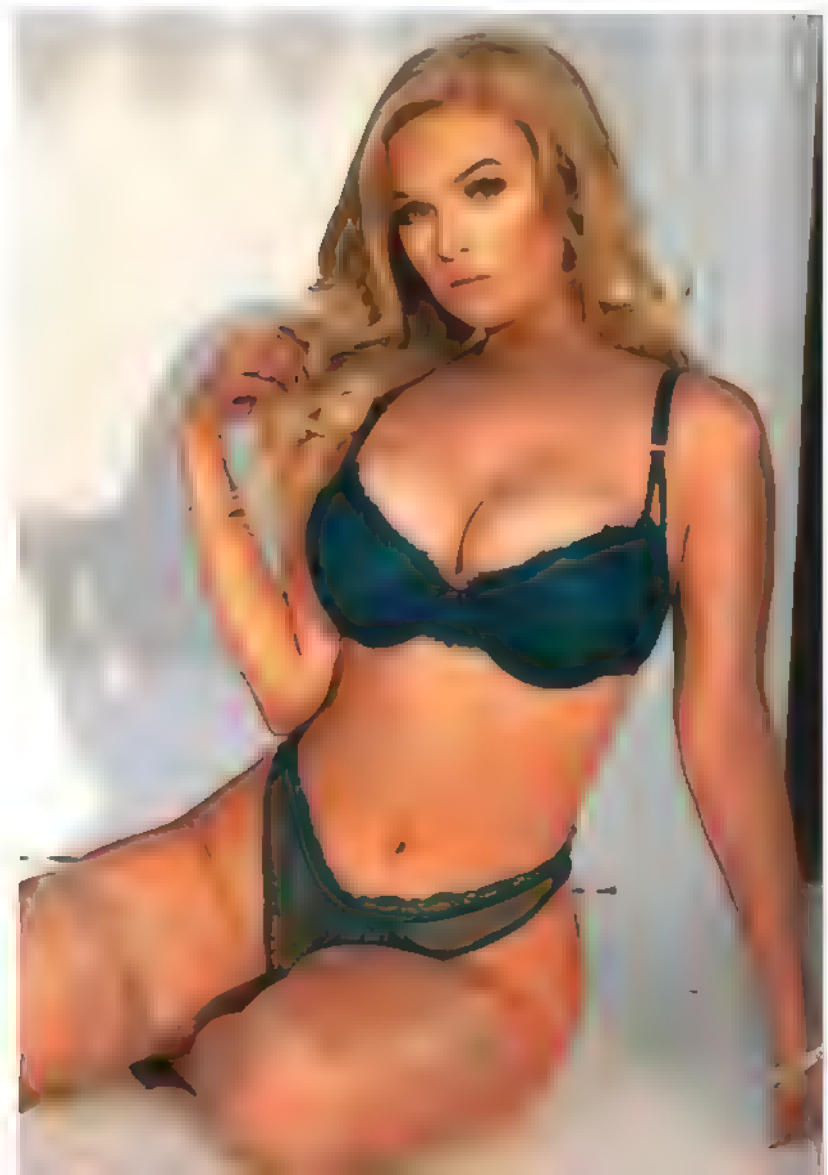
A guilty pleasure?
I'm secretly a nerd and love sci-fi movies/programmes, my favourites are marvel, happy potter, Pirates of the Caribbean and Game of Thrones.

Which song is absolutely certain to make you cry whenever you hear it?
Starting over by Niykee Heston just because it helped me get through a really hard time of my life.

What is your favourite word in any language and what does it mean?
Amor, It means love.

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
Always do you, for you!





LOUISE Jenson

Model **@OFFICIALLOUISEJENSON**

Photography by **MIKE COHEN | @MIKECOHENPHOTOS**
MUA **STEPHANIE EMMA | @STEPHANEEMMA.MAKEUPARTIST**
PR **LSA PUBLICATIONS | @LEO.ALDERMAN @LSAMODELS**

What are three things on your bucket list?
See the pyramids, win a stuffed toy at a carnival , go to a drive-in movie.

Turn ons
A nice smile, a great sense of humour and good manners.

Turn offs
Rudeness, dirty shoes and arrogance.

Describe your perfect date?
Oh tough one, as i love art so much it would have to include a gallery, fine dining, amazing wine and a great person to share that with.

Which world capital would you most like to visit and why?
Definitely Paris or Rome I'm such a romantic and i love the history

What is your mantra?
A smile is the sexiest thing you can wear.

Thank you so much for having me, kisses Louise xxx

Tell us something surprising about yourself?
I used to be a ballroom and Latin dancer.

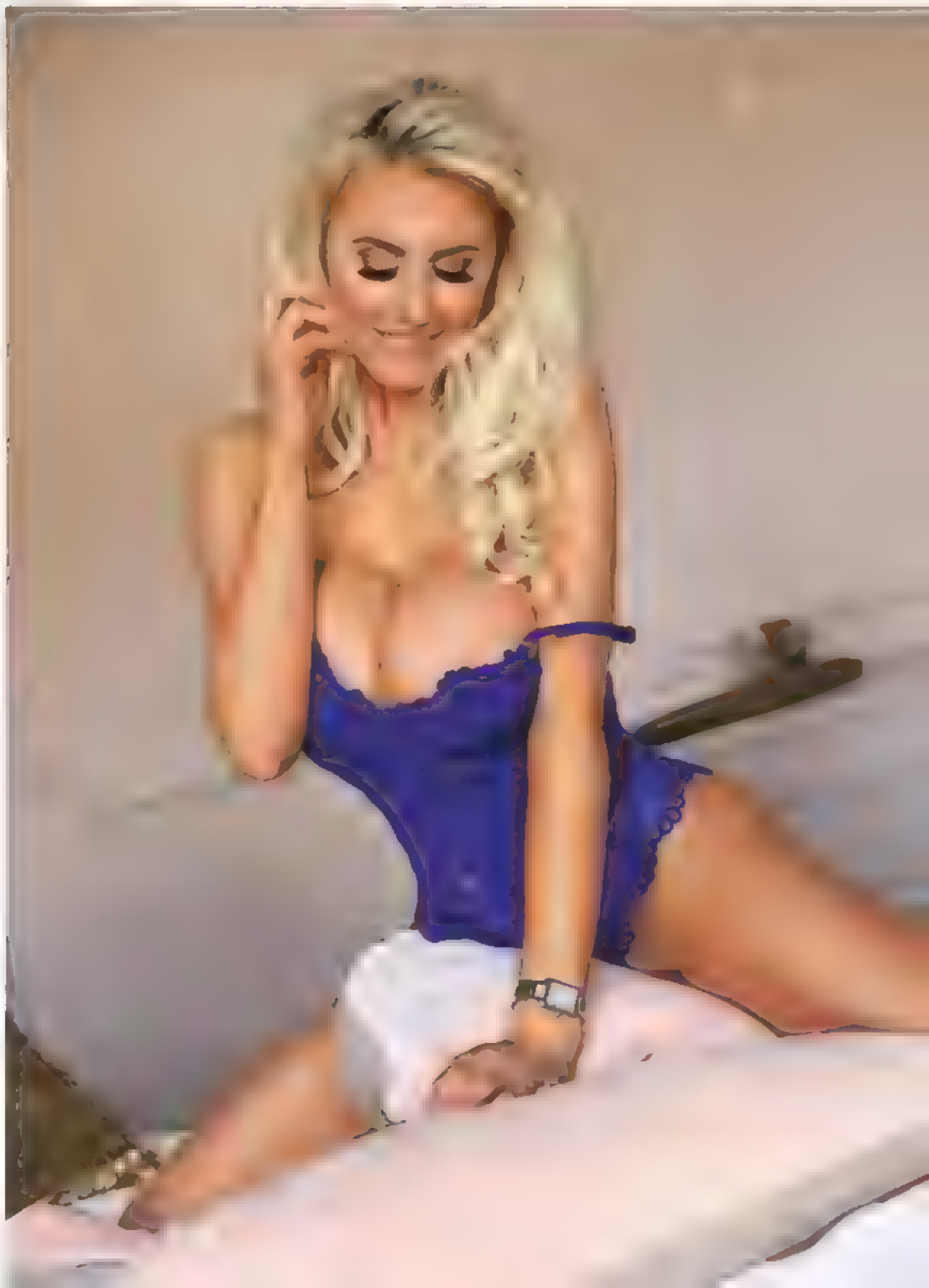
Were you excited to shoot for playboy?
Oh my goodness of course, i was super excited for the shoot and i had an absolute blast.

What inspires you?
I find inspiration in lots of things, love, art, music, sometimes just being around someone who makes you feel amazing.

Why did you choose a career in modelling?
It was sort of a happy accident but i've never looked back. I love what i do.

Who do you look upto in the modelling industry?
I'm a huge Pamela Anderson fan and of course she is a playboy Icon

What are some of your hobbies?
Walking my dogs, art galleries, shopping, dining out.



"To tell the truth, Myra, right now I'm between boyfriends."

"Single!"

Buck Brown

"I thought you'd <u>never</u> stop fiddling around!"

"Knock it off! Can't you see I'm reading?"

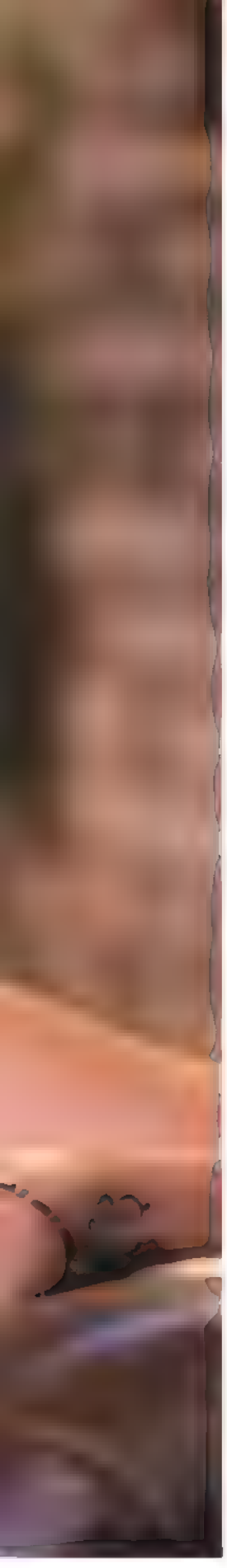
'Selling Sunset'

Star **Heather Rae** Young Retraces Her Playboy Path

Ten years after her Playmate debut, the model turned real estate maven tells us how her pictorial changed her life

WRITTEN BY
KRISTI BECK

COURTESY
NETFLIX



"Posing nude is a celebration of our bodies and our choices, and I find it empowering."

I started at Playboy in event planning, and the first time I worked with Heather Rae Young was during our 2017 Big Game Party. My role has since evolved to partner strategy, which includes keeping up with our kick-ass Playmates. My job allows me to stay in touch with Heather and learn all the exciting developments in her life since she was featured as our February 2010 Playmate.

Heather made everyone at Playboy proud last year as a star of the Netflix original series Selling Sunset. The show centers on the team at the Oppenheim Group, where she works as a high-end real estate agent. Naturally, I sent her a note right after I'd watched the first episode so I could hear all the dish.

I caught up with Heather a couple of times—first in person, and later remotely during quarantine—to chat about what it was like to take the leap from modeling to property deals, how Playboy has impacted her journey and what to expect (high-profile romance alert!) when season two premieres globally on May 22.

PLAYBOY: Can you tell me a little about your PLAYBOY shoot?
YOUNG: I'm Miss February 2010. I shot my pictorial in 2009, and it was an amazing experience. I was in a double issue, with Jaime Edmondson, so we were January and February. I shot with photographer Arny Freytag, and it was about a two-week shoot. The sets were custom-built, so it would be a couple days in between and then a new set would be constructed. My theme was mountain girl because I grew up in Big Bear and nearby Lake Arrowhead in California. I shot my video as well during that time, which was a bathtub scene.
PLAYBOY: How did you go from Playboy to real estate?
YOUNG: After modeling and appearing in PLAYBOY, real estate felt like a good transition for me because I'd met so many people and I'm really good at building relationships and making contacts. A couple of my friends actually suggested it, and originally I said no. But you know what? I did it! I studied my ass off, I passed the test and then within my first three months of doing real estate, I sold a $7.2 million house and a $1.5 million condo
PLAYBOY: Were you with the Oppenheim Group then?
YOUNG: No, I was actually with a different group then. I was showing a celebrity client a home, and that's how I met Jason Oppenheim. He saw that I was super connected, and after sitting down to meet he offered me a role with the Oppenheim Group.
PLAYBOY: How many years ago was that?
YOUNG: That was 2014 into 2015, so it's been a while.
PLAYBOY: You're a vet now!
YOUNG: I'm a vet now! But I did take some time away. Sometimes L.A. gets really overwhelming, especially for a small-town girl like me. And it's a tough industry. I left a few times to get clarity and more motivation and then came back refreshed
PLAYBOY: Do you feel the show gives us an accurate sense of your off-screen personality?
YOUNG: I was just true to myself, and I'm really happy with how I came across on camera. I am who I am, so there was nothing for me to censor.
PLAYBOY: Was that the reaction of the rest of the cast?
YOUNG: They knew what they were doing. They knew it could be cut and edited in any way, but overall we're all very happy with the show. The girls and I are actually really close, though it took me and Christine Quinn a while.
PLAYBOY: I was going to ask! Was the beef with Christine real, or did you ham it up a little for the show?
YOUNG: All the arguments are real. Christine and I have actually become close friends, and I love her because she's so opposite of me and so outspoken. When she's your friend, she has your back, and she just says what she means and how she feels. She's not a bitch like people think, and she's actually really funny.
PLAYBOY: How do you think Playboy shaped your career and your personal life?
YOUNG: It changed my life for the better. I would never take it back. I believe everything happens for a reason. I really, truly do. If I hadn't posed for PLAYBOY, I wouldn't have met the people who led me to where I am now. Playboy got me used to being in front of crowds and being good on camera. Meeting fans as a Playmate prepped me for the fans I have now, from the show. It made me

realize a lot of celebrities don't want to say hi to fans or give them the time of day, but I realized through Playboy that these people may never meet a Playmate again. So I talk to everyone. I take photos with everyone. It has changed my life.

PLAYBOY: I've been on jobs with you, and I can tell you really love your fans.

YOUNG: Absolutely. That's the positive. Some people judge me right away. Like, men expect me to be a little Barbie doll and be stupid. Men will meet me and say, "Wow, you're actually smart." And I'm like, Well, what did you think? Because I'm a Playmate, or a model, or a woman, I can't be smart as well? All the Playmates I've ever met have so much going on. We're not slutty like people think. We have husbands, boyfriends, children, ambitions, and some people don't realize that until they sit down and start talking to us.

PLAYBOY: How is it being a woman in real estate? Are there still big hurdles in that world?

YOUNG: Absolutely. I think we're not taken seriously, or we're perceived as stupid or we don't know what we're talking about. I'm lucky to be partnered with Jason, because he is well-known in the real estate business, and he treats me like an equal. We're partners. It's still a man's game, but women are rising, and clearly from the show you can see that. It's supposed to be about women's empowerment. You can be a pretty woman and still be successful and not just arm candy for a man.

It's tough, especially in L.A. You're dealing with a lot of money, big properties, big agents who have been around for 30-plus years. And this young girl comes in, and sometimes they just think I'm stupid. That's why I've taken my little breaks. I've left and then come back and said, "No, I've got this." There's no reason I shouldn't be just as successful as Jason or these others guys out here. I can do it just as well, if not better, than they can.

PLAYBOY: Since the previous season ended, I see you're in a new relationship with Flip or Flop star Tarek El Moussa. How has it been to go from a private relationship to such a public one?

YOUNG: Season two is at the very beginning of my relationship with Tarek. Going from such a private relationship to a public one is very different, but it's been amazing. I have so much support from Tarek, and the fact that we're both not only in the television world but in the same industry helps us connect on so many levels beyond our relationship. We have a deeper understanding, respect and appreciation of each other's real estate careers. He has been in this industry for so long, so he's always there to help me with advice. We're always bouncing design ideas off of each other and even learning from each other.

PLAYBOY: One more question best for last. Would you ever pose nude again?

YOUNG: Gosh. Posing nude has not hurt me. I'm already out there; I've done it. I'm proud of myself and what I've done. It's a celebration of our bodies and our choices, and I find it empowering. PLAYBOY first catapulted me into a modeling career and the career I'm in now.

Just Brit & Lil Mizz Unique

Photography by **KEN MISCHKE**
PR **LEO ALDERMAN | @LEO.ALDERMAN @LSAMODELS**

LAMBORGHINI
SERVICE
COBRA

Tell us a little about yourself.
Britt: I'm from Chicago and I'm a jack of all trades- from looking glam in front of the camera to getting down and dirty fighting fires at the firehouse!

Mizz Unique: I am a model of all types, an entertainer, traveller, animal-lover and foodie!

What do you enjoy most about what you do?
Britt: I enjoy meeting people and all the amazing types of shoots I get to do- from lingerie to working with animals! Totally makes this not a job!

Mizz Unique: Travelling! I love to see new places and meet interesting new people in my travels.

What is your greatest life achievement thus far?
Britt: My greatest life achievement...that's a tough questions! I would say making it to all my destination shoots so far!

Mizz Unique: Achieving total confidence and moulding a life I truly enjoy!

What would you say is your best feature?
Britt: My best feature would have to be my eyes and booty! But aside from that I'd say the fact that I am a jack of all trades makes that the best!

Mizz Unique: My mind of course; its what keeps this body together and healthy, and allows me to connect with different people of all kinds of backgrounds.

What makes you feel sexy?
Britt: What makes me feel sexy is when I can be myself. Nothing is more refreshing than that!

Mizz Unique: Nude! I am very comfortable in my own skin, I feel I must've been a nudist in a past life, other than that I would say I feel pretty sexy in full lingerie sets, some silky soft thigh highs or nylons.

What advice would you give to women aspiring to get into modelling?
Britt: Advice I would give to other ladies is simple; be yourself and find your own nitch! Modelling isn't easy but is totally worth it!

Mizz Unique: "Do what makes you happy, and live everyday like it's your last!" But, it is very hard, you have to have drive and have a strong skin for criticism and difficult people.

Favourite Shoot Location?
Britt: I don't have a set favourite location, but definitely love shooting outdoors all year round!

Mizz Unquie: Any beach anywhere under the sun! I like it hot, and enjoy
the sounds of the water, so relaxing!

Do you prefer kissing or cuddling?
Britt: I'm a sincere hopeless romantic so definitely cuddling!

Mizz Unique: Cuddling for sure! I'm usually a cold person so cuddling is a must to keep my butt warm and happy!

What are you really good at?
Britt: I'd like to think I'm really good at being a sincere, and good person!

Mizz Unique: Being me! Unique! I can guarantee you won't meet anybody like me! O also adapt and learn things quickly.

What is one thing people may be surprised to find out about you?
Britt: People are insanely to surprised to learn that not only am I a pretty face but that I am also an active firefighter / emergency medical technician

Mizz Unique: Most people are shocked to hear I was in the army reserves for a few years before I started modelling. It was definitely an important stepping stone in my life because it showed me how strong I truly am.

Do you have a catchphrase?
Britt: My catchphrase would probably have to be follow your dreams!
Especially since I'm a dreamer!

Mizz Unique: Woot Woot! Is my catchphrase and basically gets shouted out anytime I'm excited or having fun!

Dear PLAYBOY ADVISOR

Can Weed Help Me Revive My Sex Life?

Ashley Manta, a.k.a. the CannaSexual, offers her broad-spectrum expertise on cannabis in the bedroom—from strains to suppositories

BY **ASHLEY MANTA**

Q. I'm a 34-year-old woman and I've been with my boyfriend for three years. When we moved in together last year, our sex life started to feel routine. We're both using the same moves we've used since the beginning of our relationship. They sort of work, but I find myself getting bored. When I try to tell him this, he gets defensive and makes it seem like I'm saying he's a bad lover. I'm not! I've seen articles about couples using weed to connect more honestly and make sex feel better, but every time I walk into a dispensary I'm overwhelmed by the selection. Plus, asking the person behind the counter about my sex life feels like TMI. Can you help me?—B.A.,

A. Most couples struggle with this at one point or another, especially when they've been together for a while. We live in a culture in which most, if not all, of our sexual knowledge comes from trial and error: We go by past experience and what we see modeled in porn and popular media. Adults often operate under the misguided belief that they should just know how to have sex. The reality is, it's not that simple. Even past experience gets you only so far, because each new partner is different and people's needs and responses change over time! This is why it's so important for partners to be able to talk to each other openly and to give and receive feedback without taking it as criticism.

So before we talk about cannabis and sex, it's vital that we talk cannabis and communication. When it's used mindfully, cannabis can be helpful for these sorts of conversations. Don't just get stoned and try to have a difficult conversation; set a time to talk, and give yourselves at least an hour so you're not rushed. If you're a current cannabis consumer, pick a product or strain that helps put you in a calm and grounded headspace. Use just enough to make you feel present and open.

Start with what I call "setting the listening": Open the conversation by sharing your intention ("I want us to have more pleasurable sex together, and I have some ideas I'd like to discuss with you") and then share any fears that might be standing in the way of a productive discussion ("I'm afraid you'll hear this as criticism, when the truth is I think you're a talented lover and I want us to work together to co-create awesome sexy times"). You've heard it a million times, but it's worth restating: Use "I statements" to share your experience in a way that will be less likely to trigger defensiveness. It may also help to go in prepared with some suggestions for improvement rather than simply lamenting that things aren't where you want them to be.

Ask your boyfriend what he wishes could be different in your sexual escapades. Maybe he's been longing for more dirty talk or something to spice up your hand-job techniques. You can also talk more broadly about the way you approach sex. Is it often the same routine of kissing, groping, oral, then penetration till someone comes, then sleep? Try shaking things up by having a date night when you just make out or just masturbate in front of the other, or have an "anything but the genitals" rule where you can touch every part of the body except what's between your legs. Try dressing up in sexy outfits or pretending you're strangers who met at a club. Think outside the box. Cannabis can help loosen your inhibitions and allow you to access the parts of yourself you may be too shy to share with your partner. It may feel awkward at first, and that's okay! Embrace it. Call it out. You're on the same team; this is all about finding mutual wins.

As for finding the right product, I understand your reluctance to ask budtenders for advice. Honestly, though they can tell you the benefits of particular products the store carries, they're likely not able to give specific recommendations for sex, because desire and arousal are so subjective. It helps to go in knowing how you want to feel—more energized, less stressed, more relaxed, etc.—and ask for recommendations based on that. Avoid using indica/sativa as a predictor of effects. Those designations have become conversational shorthand but aren't actually reliable, because people vary so much in body chemistry and tolerance, not to mention mindset and setting. Broadly, I can tell you that inhalation methods (smoking, vaping) are better for quick-acting results; topicals (massage balms, creams, bath products and genital-focused intimacy oils) are best if you don't want to feel intoxicated; and edibles are best left to more experienced consumers due to their high variability and length of onset time (it can take up to two hours for edibles to reach maximum effects). Hope this helps!

Q. I struggle to orgasm with a partner. What would be your advice for me or my partner? Can cannabis help with this?—H.R.,

A. We talked about the necessity of communication, and the ways cannabis can support it, in response to the previous question; now let's get down to the nitty-gritty. If you struggle to orgasm during penetrative intercourse with your partner, you have many options. Cannabis topical oils can be applied externally to the vulva: the clit, inner labia and vaginal opening. Let it marinate for around 20 minutes and note if your sensations are heightened. Remember that oil and latex are not compatible, so if you'll be using oil products during sex, make sure to choose oil-friendly barriers. Also, remember that most people with vulvas need clitoral stimulation to orgasm, so don't be afraid to pull out a toy or use your fingers during or after penetration. You can also choose positions that are better for clitoral stimulation—for instance, lying on top of your partner (like cowgirl but flat) and grinding your clit against their pelvis as you rock back and forth. The internal clitoral structure is much larger than the little button you see on the outside. (Check out this diagram of the clitoral complex.) This means you get to experiment with this newfound knowledge of your anatomy and try to find different ways to stimulate all the parts of your clit. You and your partner can work cooperatively to explore this uncharted territory together.

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Q. My girlfriend and I have a lot of fun during sex, but she tells me that every time we do it I'm hurting her with my penis. How can I fix this?—R.S.,

A. This is such an important question; thank you for caring enough to ask! Consensual pain during sex can be awesome, but when a partner is experiencing pain during penetration, that's cause for concern. Different factors can contribute, including (but not limited to) insufficient lubrication, not enough warm-up, cervical soreness, STI complications, pelvic-floor tension or spasm and involuntary contraction due to psychological factors such as trauma. I encourage anyone experiencing pain with penetration to see a health care professional to rule out physical causes.

Cannabis is an excellent pain reliever, so one way to reduce discomfort during sex is to use a THC- and/or CBD-infused suppository. It's inserted vaginally about 30 to 60 minutes before foreplay begins, and it helps reduce discomfort and inflammation. Another product has become incredibly popular among folks who experience pain with deep penetration: Ohnut. This wearable accessory goes around the shaft of the penis and creates a bumper that prevents it from going past a certain point. This is great for people who have sensitivities but enjoy vigorous penetration or deep insertion through doggy style and similar positions.

Finally, I cannot overstate the importance of lube. Many mistakenly believe that lube is only for older adults, or that if a person is turned on they should be sufficiently wet without the need for synthetic lube. According to sex educator Emily Nagoski the truth is that most people with vulvas get wet when aroused about 10 percent of the time. That means the rest of the time they could be incredibly turned on but not very wet at all. When it comes to pain, lube reduces the likelihood of micro tears in the vaginal tissue, which can be painful and increase the likelihood of STI transmission. In short, lube is probably good for everyone. As famed pleasure pioneer Betty Dodson likes to say, "You should never touch a pussy with a dry hand." Or a dry toy. Or a dry penis. You get the idea.

Q. Are there sex toys that can make me orgasm without losing my virginity? I'm 23 years old, and because of my personal beliefs I want to be a virgin when I marry, but I also want to enjoy my body. Can you help?—S.C.,

A. I'm so happy to hear that you want to enjoy your body and experience orgasm. I can tell that your personal beliefs are important to you, and I want to honor them while correcting some misinformation you may have received over time. First and most important, virginity is a social construct. If you line up five adults and ask them to define the loss of virginity, you'll receive five different answers. Some will say vaginal penetration with a penis, some will say any sexual contact including masturbation, some will say penetration with any object, some will focus on "popping the cherry" or perforating the hymen. Quick anatomy lesson: The hymen does not seal the vaginal opening. It's a donut shape, with a hole in the middle. When the hymen is stretched, it can cause bleeding, but independent of penetration, the hymen can also be worn away from engaging in activities such as horseback riding or biking. The "hymen checks" you hear about some doctors performing at the behest of controlling parents are not a reliable indicator of anything.

What all this means in regard to your question is that you can use fingers, dildos, vibrators, plugs or any other pleasure-inducing toy to enjoy your body without impacting "virginity," since only you can truly decide what constitutes virginity. If you choose not to include toys of that nature, you still have plenty of external-stimulation products to explore.

I fully support setting appropriate boundaries for your comfort and beliefs. Those decisions, whatever the basis, are yours to make and are entirely valid. I simply encourage you to explore your body and your pleasure in ways that feel good for you—and try not to fixate too much on amorphous concepts like virginity.

Q. I smoke almost every day, and I recently got some CBD oil I would like to try. Someone told me that CBD oil reduces the effectiveness of smoking or ingesting THC. Is this accurate?—S.K.,

A. This question comes up all the time. There are many misconceptions about THC and CBD, especially with regard to sex. Some say that CBD can counteract the sensation of a too-intense high, but studies have yet to fully confirm this. What is true is that the cannabis plant produces numerous compounds called cannabinoids; THC and CBD are just two of them. These cannabinoids work in concert with each other and interact with the

endocannabinoid system that promotes homeostasis in the body. All cannabinoids are valuable, and they seem, based on preliminary research, to work better together. So to answer your question—no, taking CBD oil will not decrease the effectiveness of smoking THC. If anything, in my opinion, it may give you a more balanced mind-body experience.

I recommend a one-to-one CBD-to-THC ratio for people who are new to combining sex and cannabis so you can enjoy the sensation-enhancing benefits of THC without getting too intoxicated. Because hemp-derived CBD still operates in a legal gray area, it's crucial to choose reputable sources for your products. Make sure test results are available that show the products are free of pesticides and solvents, and don't go bargain hunting. If you can buy it at a gas station, it's probably not good quality.

Finally, choose full- or broad-spectrum CBD products over CBD-isolate products. As you just learned, CBD works better in conjunction with other cannabinoids, including THC, so full-spectrum CBD products will include many of those other helpful cannabinoids, including up to 0.3 percent THC—the maximum allowed by law for a cannabis plant to be considered hemp. (Yes, hemp is cannabis; it's just a legal distinction referring to the amount of THC a plant contains.) So go forth and enjoy the ride!

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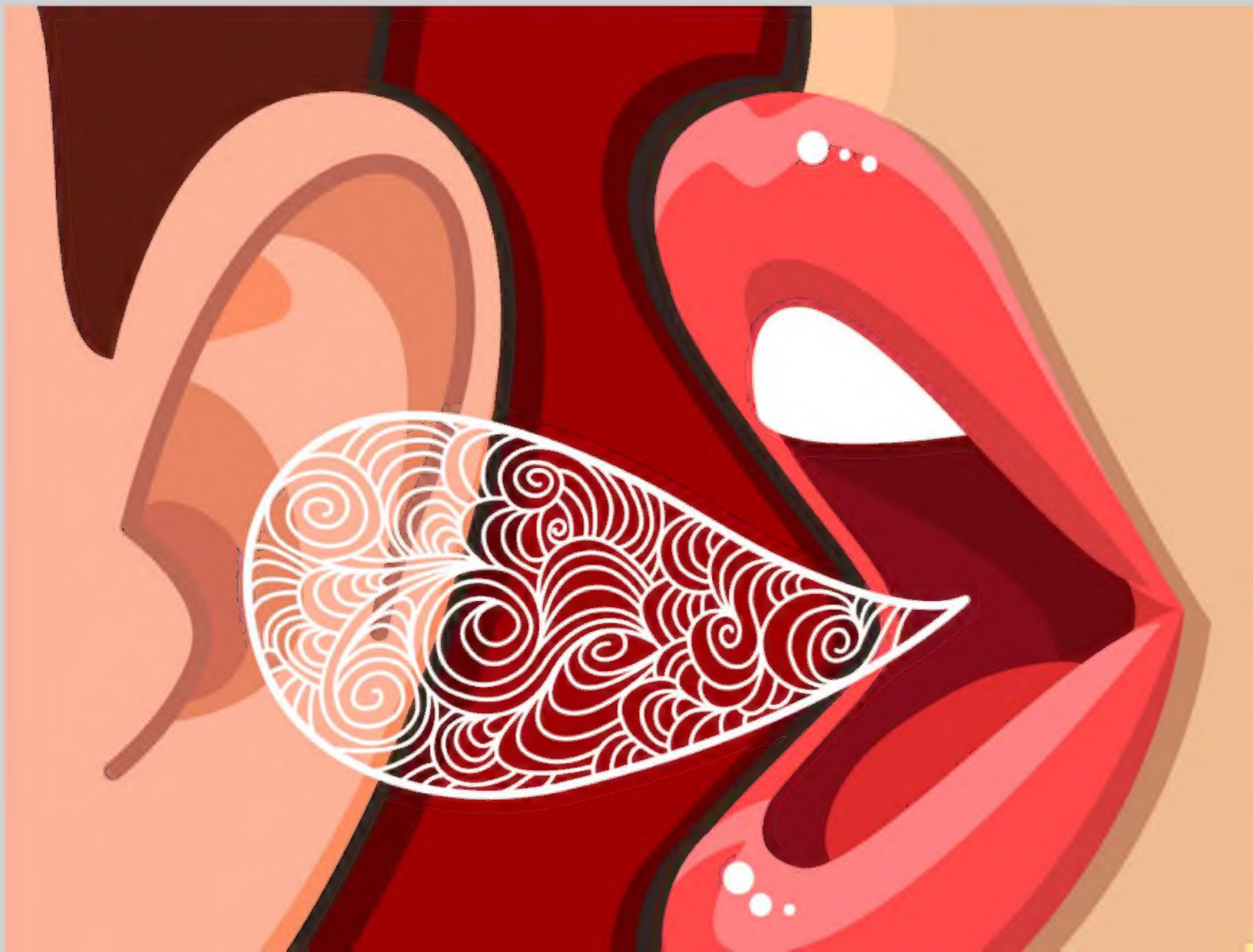

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